Dissent

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SUSAN GEORGE on the WTO's Brave New Globe

Jaytalking in America

Marshall Berman ■ MARGOT ADLER ■ ANDREW DELBANCO ■ JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS ■ JULES FEIFFER ■ TODD GITLIN ■ RUSSELL JACOBY ■ RACHEL NEUMANN ■ ELLEN WILLIS

ARGUMENTS

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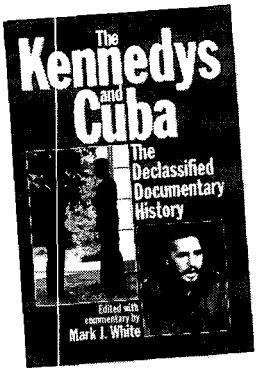

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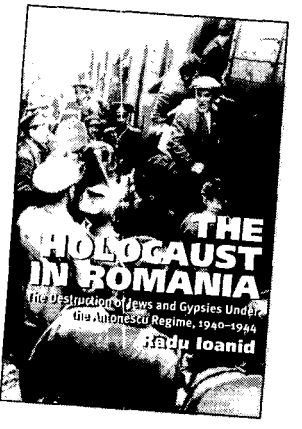

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Editor's Page

OUR COUNTRY lacks critical culture today, brooks little questioning of "how human beings should live and what our life means." So argues Marshall Berman in his remarks opening the symposium in this issue. We need, he proposes, some "jaytalking." But Andrew Delbanco dissents. "Jaytalking"—"transgressive" talk—is everywhere, he writes, and it is as "safe as the misdemeanor from which [Berman] derives the term." Could it be that both are right?—that a breakdown of substantive questioning engenders impotent "transgressions" by intellectuals, postures that substitute for serious criticism? ■ More than "jaytalking" took place in Seattle's streets this past December. Protesters against the World Trade Organization raised important questions that ought not to be obscured by a violent minority's actions. For starters, who and what are "free" in today's "free trade"? Who gets a free ride? WTO priorities reflect the economic correctness of neoliberalism: market dictatorship is "free" trade, critics are Luddites. The *New York Times*'s Thomas Friedman tarred demonstrators as "flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions, and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix." Social suffering, that sideshow to profits, will be alleviated when "the power of trade, the power of the Internet and the power of consumers" persuade or "embarrass" corporations and regimes. Absent from his list: the power of democratic citizenship. ■ Economically incorrect John Sweeney—whose stewardship of the AFL-CIO is appraised by Harold Meyerson in this issue—insists that "accountability, democratic procedures, workers' and human rights, and the environment" must be integral to the governance of international trade. The point is not to quash markets or global commerce—only market mysticism. Commodities, even Nike sneakers, do not move "freely" on markets. Only human beings can be free; the political, social, and economic conditions of their lives can enable or hinder freedom. Susan George must be a flat-earther when she warns in our "Brave New Globe" series that for the WTO, "a product is a product, period." Who wants "to hear about how it was produced, by whom, [and] under what conditions"? ■ Looking back at the history of Western socialism, Donald Sassoon concludes that "the impetus to transform capitalism" into a "relatively civilized system" always comes "from those dissatisfied with the absolute rule of market forces." It hasn't come from economic correctness. True, even Bill Clinton now says labor and environmental standards are needed in trade accords. But he says so only on becoming a lame duck. After eight years of his third way—during which social democrats and liberals were chastised as insufficiently "modernized"—we may find a Republican president added to a Republican Congress just as several Supreme Court seats become vacant. We may find that the third way led from George Bush to George Bush *bis*. Something to ponder as the political season begins.

— MC

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Dissent

Winter 2000

Editor's Page
MITCHELL COHEN
1

Comments and Opinions
MICHAEL WALZER looks at the presidential election , 5 ■ KIRA BRUNNER goes to the "Sensation" exhibit, 7 ■ JEFFREY C. ISAAC questions left responses to hate crimes, 9

Brave New Globe
SUSAN GEORGE on resisting the World Trade Organization's brand of globalization, 13

Politics Abroad
BORIS KAPUSTIN on Russia as a postmodern society, 17 ■ GABRIELLE BANKS on youth gangs in El Salvador, 22

Symposium: Jaytalking in America
30
MARSHALL BERMAN on a critical culture, with inspiration from Jules Feiffer; responses from MARGOT ADLER, ANDREW DELBANCO, JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS, TODD GITLIN, RUSSELL JACOBY, RACHEL NEUMANN, and ELLEN WILLIS

Articles
Rolling the Union On
HAROLD MEYERSON
47

Socialism: Mission Accomplished or Mission Impossible?
DONALD SASSOON
56

Fin-de-Siècle Communism in Western Europe
MARC LAZAR
62

The Family: What Do We Really Want?
MICHAEL RUSTIN
66

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American Environmentalism Confronts the Global Economy
KEN CONCA
72

Arguments

79
E. J. DIONNE, JR., PETER LAARMAN, ROSALIND PETCHESKY, and KATHA POLLITT take issue with MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS on Catholics and the Democratic Party and she responds

Notebook

NICOLAUS MILLS on a sitcom president, 89
JO-ANN MORT on Günter Grass, 90

In Memoriam

Simone Plastrik: 1919-1999
92
Remembrances by MARK LEVINSON, NICOLAUS MILLS, BRIAN MORTON, MAXINE PHILLIPS, and MICHAEL WALZER

Reconsiderations

HORST BRAND on Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, 103

Books

ERIC ALTERMAN on Michael Lind's *Vietnam: The Necessary War*, 105
SCOTT SHERMAN on Friedrich Katz's *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 109
RUTH ROSEN on Blanche Wiesen Cook's *Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume Two, 1933-1938*, 114
BENJAMIN MARTIN on Ted Morgan's *A Covert Life*, 118
TODD GITLIN on Russ Rymer's *American Beach*, 122

Letters

125

The Last Page

CHRISTINE STANSELL
128

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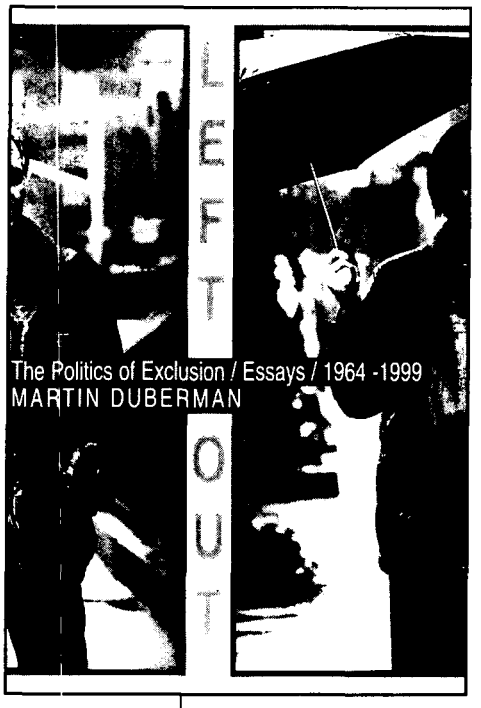

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Choosing a President 2000

Michael Walzer

IT IS HARD to figure out what the stakes are in this year's presidential election. "Compassionate conservatism" looks very much like a Republican version of the "third way," and the third way looks more and more like a Democratic version of compassionate conservatism. It does matter, of course, who wins, for a Democratic victory, especially if it extends to Congress, opens the way for left initiatives of many different kinds, while a Republican victory means four more years of defensive politics. But high expectations aren't likely to be the mark of election 2000. The most interesting questions, at this early point, have more to do with the process than with the possible outcome.

What does all the money mean? I am not sure that the people who give so much money to political candidates actually get what they presumably think they are paying for (I am skeptical in the same way about commercial advertising). But they must get something, and what they get must at least sometimes be tangible, else they wouldn't keep writing checks.

What do the contributors want? They want attention most of all; they want to be kept in mind. They mostly understand that results can't be guaranteed; the interests of wealthy contributors are sure to come into conflict with each other (even when the rest of us are out of the picture), and elected officials have to decide on a kind of political triage. But attention is sufficiently important, especially when you think about what it means never to be attended to by political leaders. And if contributors are turned down on this or that request, they expect the officeholders they helped elect to say something like this: "Look, I can't do whatever-it-is for you; there are too many other factors involved; and too many journalists are watching, so it isn't even prudent. But, down the road, I will do something else for you."

Whether contributors get everything they want or not, now or later, their money corrupts the democratic system. The corrupting effects intensify as campaigns get more and more expensive and contributions increase to match the expenses. Defenders of the status quo argue that corporate wealth has no greater influence here than in countries that finance elections with tax money. I suspect that private interests are better served here—and served more quickly and quietly. But, whether that is true or not, the disillusionment with politics, which is one of the effects of all the getting and spending, is certainly greater here. In this television age, the gifts of time and energy that ordinary citizens can bring never seem to balance the gifts of wealth—which may help to account for the steady withdrawal of ordinary citizens from the political arena.

Is it an advantage that money is now spent on campaign expenses rather than (as it used to be) on bribing candidates? Well, this indirect path requires more money, which may be good for the economy; it pays a lot of salaries for ad writers, camera crews, television producers, make-up artists, travel agents, public relations specialists, and advisers of all sorts, and maybe this money trickles down to the rest of us. And voters trying to sort out the endless television ads are at least engaged in a kind of democratic decision-making, which the bribery system radically undercuts. But it is a depressing spectacle, nonetheless, to see candidates spending half their time begging for money and the other half using the money, with "expert" advice, to manipulate the voters.

So "campaign reform" is one of the central issues of the campaign. All the candidates run corrupt campaigns, assure the voters that they are only doing this because everybody else is doing it, and promise reform. Most of them have

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a history on this issue, so it's possible to assign degrees of plausibility (and implausibility) to the different promises. Even so, I am torn between thinking that how we elect presidents really ought to be the central issue of this presidential election and thinking that the other issues, social and economic, are much more central. Focusing on the campaign obscures so many other things. Maybe democracy itself, the value of organization, mobilization, and public discussion over against the value of money, ought to be our focus in 2000, but maybe not.

What do the numbers mean? Should we be concerned that fewer and fewer people vote or only that fewer and fewer of "our" people vote? It once was a maxim on the left that the greater the turnout, the better the chances of liberal and center-left candidates. Now there is disagreement among the students of electoral behavior, some of whom believe that the critical question isn't how many, but who. I still incline to the view that it's a good thing in a democracy if many people vote, the more the better, at least until a substantial majority of the electorate is engaged. After that, it's probably just as well that people who are indifferent to politics or ignorant about the issues stay home. But we should worry about the strength of democracy and the commitment of our fellow citizens if most people turn out to be indifferent and ignorant—or if large numbers of them, as in the United States today, are passive in the face of wealth and power and cynical about the proposition that elections make a difference.

It is true, though, that a simple reversal of what happened in 1994—when many workers and union members stayed home and newly mobilized men and women from the Christian right replaced them—would restore the Democratic congressional majority, even if the same percentage of eligible voters (37 to 38 percent), and no more, showed up at the polls. In a presidential year, it's certain that more people will show up (just under 50 percent last time), but still, the numbers are going to be low, and the campaigns will address themselves to the relatively small groups of citizens at the margins, who may or may not vote, or who may vote for either party. What would American politics be like if 75 percent of the electorate participated? A new ball game or more of the same?

I am not sure anyone knows. It would be an experiment in democracy. Suppose further that it wasn't possible to reach these voters by spending tens of millions of dollars on television advertising; suppose that they had to be reached by reinvigorating political parties, organizing at the local and state levels, finding party workers in the wards and precincts of our cities, knocking on doors and passing out leaflets....no, no, it's a romantic fantasy.

What should the issues be? Apparently focus groups decide on the "issues" these days, and I have never been asked to focus in a group. Once again I have a romantic image of the way things ought to be: political parties should work hard to shape the issues in ways that match their longstanding ideological commitments. A party of Dissentniks, for example, would surely try to make an issue of the vast inequalities of American society and the growing vulnerability of poorer Americans, and many middle-class Americans too, to market forces. In recent years, health care has been a stand-in for this larger issue, because of the marketization represented by HMO expansion and the steadily increasing numbers of uninsured Americans. It is an inadequate but still a useful stand-in and, apparently, enough of the focus groups have focused on it, so that the cost and quality of care have already figured at least in the Gore and Bradley campaigns.

But it looks now as if the chief domestic issue will be education, with the Republicans defending vouchers and "school choice" and the Democrats . . . doing what? A center-left party with steady commitments (even a European third-way social democracy) would surely provide a strong defense of public schooling and a program for strengthening the public schools. I assume that the Democrats will stand on this side of the question, but they are, apparently, consulting their focus groups before deciding exactly where on this side to stand.

So maybe citizens should insist on electing representatives to the focus groups. But how much money would it cost to get elected? And how many of us would bother to vote? ●

MICHAEL WALZER is co-editor of *Dissent*.

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Art, Politics, and Talk

Kira Brunner

No one could walk into the now infamous "Sensation" exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art (BMA), without having been over saturated by media hype. An unmediated look at the show has became impossible.

By the time I walked through the doors, the mayor of New York had already condemned the exhibit as "sick stuff." Art Critics had proclaimed it a commentary on African art. British museum goers had denounced it as American pop art repackaged and shipped back to the states to be sold anew. Countless articles, op-ed pieces, and commentaries had been written on all sides. More than the art itself, it was the fever of information and opinion surrounding it that made the exhibit worth seeing. The most exiting moments of "Sensation" were found not in the museum but in call-in radio shows, and in the *New Yorker* and the *Nation*. Hillary Clinton was no exception; she was pro museum, anti-elephant dung.

The controversy ignited when New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani denounced Chris Ofili's painting "The Holy Virgin Mary"—a portrait of a black Virgin Mary with one breast made of elephant dung surrounded by delicate butterfly-shaped pornographic pictures—as nothing more then Catholic bashing. But if elephant dung and pornographic butterflies had deflowered the Virgin, her innocence, thanks to the controversy, is now safely under the protection of two security guards and a wall of bulletproof glass. She has been reinstated to her original iconic status, with a twenty-first century twist.

As the weeks went by, suspense grew. Would the mayor evict the museum from its city-owned home and cut off all city subsidies? What would become of the unionized museum employees? Was Christie's funding the show in order to make a bundle at auction? Would the Catholic League for Civil and Religious Rights shut it down? Would the union representing the museum workers take action?

Oddly enough, when "Sensation" opened at the Royal Academy in London in 1997 the Ofili painting didn't cause much sensation. Instead, the controversy orbited around Marcus Harvey's oversized portrait of the infamous child murderer Myra Hindley, whose crimes had repulsed and fascinated the British public. What offended so many people in the British context was ignored in the American. At BMA, the curators thought it necessary to place a card next to the looming portrait made up of what looked like hundreds of child-size hand prints that asked, "Do you think that this should be one of the most controversial paintings in the exhibit?"—as if to announce their disappointment that it wasn't. Interestingly, the two most controversial images on both sides of the Atlantic were icons, one religious, one cultural.

If "Sensation" is meant to be shocking, it works. Consider "Great Deeds Against the Dead," a piece by the Chapman brothers—a jumble of chopped up bloody plastic bodies hanging from a tree. The sculpture was supposed to be a life size representation of Goya's "Disasters of War." Instead, it looks like a relic from a traveling carnival's haunted house. "The Chapmans," the cue card read, "have said they want to entrap the viewer into laughter." Forcing these unworldly moments where we find ourselves confronting our own obscurities is clever. Turning war into kitsch is clever. But there are only so many rooms of existential gimmicks that one can walk through before they begin to lose their weight.

In fact, it was the buzz in the air, not the art, that agitated the museum goers to think. The museum was saturated with controversy:

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there were journalists waving press passes to get past the hour-long lines, there was bewilderment on the faces of those who had probably never been to BMA before. "Zoo Doo" elephant dung fertilizer was sold at the gift shop next to the post cards and art books. And outside, gated behind police barricades, looking like their own installation piece, outraged Christians chanted, "Stop hate crimes against the Virgin Mary." It felt as if we, the spectators, were making better art.

Some have argued that "Sensation" was little more then a stunt to lure more people out to Brooklyn. And surely its ability to draw a crowd is undeniable. It does seem that the BMA has been trying over the last year to increase attendance by undertaking a number of controversial strategies to get people into their galleries. In October, 1998 the museum began a series called "First Saturdays." The first Saturday of every month is free; there are gallery talks, artist discussions, films; and in the evening a tremendous dance party. The museum began packing them in. But this created a schism within the museum. Were the roughly seven thousand people coming for art or for swing dancing?

What was most extraordinary about "Sensation" is that it became a public conversation. It provoked a lot of serious thinking. We the public focused our concern, our attention, and pages and pages of magazine and newspaper articles on our own quandaries about religion, power, censorship, government, free speech, and the nature of art. Art fills a space that nothing else does. It goes without saying that this space should be held open; museums should not be closed down by politicians up for big elections. Art has the wonderful and uncanny ability to demand that we pay attention to things we would not otherwise notice, but it should not do this only by provoking outrage, discomfort, and shock. Otherwise it falls into the trap of becoming just one more thing that isn't worth our notice.

One of the "Sensation" artists, Damien Hirst, was quoted in the *New Yorker* as saying, "A lot of people think art's weird and stupid, I want to get to those people, get them to come in and go 'Arrrgh!'" The show may not have been successful as art, but it was successful as a good scream. ●

KIRA BRUNNER is an assistant editor of *Dissent*.

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Responding to Hate

Jeffrey C. Isaac

I HAD ALWAYS been sympathetic toward the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Southern Poverty Law Center. As a Jew whose father's family had been murdered during the Holocaust, and as someone on "the left" for whom the civil rights movement was a decisive moment of contemporary politics, I could not help but support organizations that monitored and opposed so-called "hate groups" like the KKK and the Aryan Nation. But these issues never engaged me deeply. The hate groups seemed utterly marginal in American life. And the question of whether or not to be against them never struck me as interesting. If asked, I would answer "of course I oppose them," and then I would proceed to read about and talk about all the "bigger" questions—about capitalism, liberalism, democracy, civil society.

Then, in July of 1998, I woke up one morning to discover that sections of the college town in which I live—Bloomington, Indiana—had been blanketed with vicious anti-Semitic and racist literature. I was shocked, as were many of my friends and neighbors. After a number of such incidents some of us felt the need to respond in a serious way to this leafleting, which was politically revolting but also threatening to many, especially Jews and people of color, who were singled out in inflammatory ways by the leaflets. Before long an ad hoc community group called Bloomington United was formed. We ran ads in the local newspaper condemning the expressions of hate. We raised a few thousand dollars to produce cardboard signs that read "Bloomington United. No Hate Speech. No Hate Crimes. Not in our Yards. Not in our Town. Not Anywhere." The community outpouring of support was tremendous. Thousands of signs went up all over town. We organized a march, joined by more than a thousand people, from the campus of Indiana University to the town square, where for over an hour speakers including the mayor, an African-American minister representing the United Methodist Church, the rabbi of the only synagogue in town, and representatives of the gay community and the labor movement spoke out in favor of civility and equal respect.

Bloomington United brought together leaders from the Jewish community, the gay/lesbian/transgendered community, the African-American community, and a wide range of citizens. It helped to organize study circles on race. It sought connections with the public schools. And then, on the weekend of July 4, 1999, the young man who had been distributing the neo-nazi literature—one Benjamin "August" Smith, a "representative" of the neo-nazi World Church of the Creator—went on a shooting spree that left two people dead and eleven others injured. One of those killed was a Korean graduate student at Indiana University, Won-Joon Yoon, who was shot while standing outside Bloomington's only Korean church. The community responded with a "Gathering of Healing." More than three thousand people attended, a standing-room-only crowd, with people of all ages, races, and religions spilling outside the hall. The mayor spoke. IU's vice-chancellor spoke, followed by the Hillel rabbi, and by Janet Reno. It was a moving event, and in its wake Bloomington United continues to function as a symbol of democratic civility and as a respected community group. Indeed, one of my leftist friends in the university has gone so far as to describe Bloomington United as "the largest social movement" in the recent history of Bloomington.

Like any social movement, Bloomington United is a diverse group. It has grappled with some thorny issues related to the representation of specific groups—Asians and Asian

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Americans, African Americans, Jewish Americans, and especially gays—and it has thus far navigated these successfully. It has confronted criticisms from segments of the African-American campus community for worrying too much about hate groups and not enough about broader issues of racism. It has confronted criticisms for being too "liberal," for preaching to the converted, and for failing to organize lower-class whites in the hinterlands of Southern Indiana. And it has sought to address these challenges and criticisms, making adjustments when necessary.

In the course of this activity I learned that the issues of hate, hate groups, and hate crimes are very real, that they are capable of shocking and galvanizing a community, and that they are inextricably related to the "bigger" issues that we on the left typically and rightfully address—issues like racism, class inequality and resentment, media violence, and the accessibility of dangerous weapons. But efforts like Bloomington United draw their energy from their specificity, and it is sometimes important to make the connections but not make them too sharply. Bloomington United includes labor people and the president of the Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, who is one of the most important activists. It includes leaders of the gay community and religious people whose churches are uncomfortable with homosexuality. That is its strength. There is a politics here, and it is a politics of inclusivity and democratic civility that has the potential to radiate out onto other issues. But it is also a very specific kind of politics, an ad hoc civic initiative that avoids strong ideological definition.

As a participant, I have found it both publicly necessary and intellectually challenging to explain this politics and to respond to some of the unfair criticisms of it, often made by individuals who have stood on the sidelines. Many of these criticisms were echoed this fall in a piece published in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* by Andrew Sullivan, "What's So Bad About Hate?" Sullivan argues that the motivations behind hate are various and that the subjective experience of hate takes different forms and has different effects depending on who is acting it out. His conclusion: the preoccupation with hate is overstated and sentimental, there is really no intellectually respectable way to distinguish hate crimes from other crimes; and hate-crimes laws can only have pernicious effects.

Sullivan's argument is powerful, but only because he insists on interpreting "hate" the way much of the sentimental discourse he criticizes interprets it—in subjective, purely experiential terms, as a personal feeling or passion. If only we can make people feel nicer toward one another, we could eliminate hate; Sullivan is rightly suspicious of the legislation of niceness. But behind this admittedly sentimental way of thinking about hate lies a very real, historical and political phenomenon—the activities of hate groups, mainly, though not exclusively, right-wing organizations that systematically promote hostility toward racial, religious, and sexual minorities that talk about and plan "racial holy wars"; and that offer various forms of military and paramilitary inspiration and training to their members, supporters, and fellow travelers.

Sullivan conveniently downplays this phenomenon. He describes it as "mercifully rare" in the United States, writing it off as the province of sociopaths and psychopaths with no "widespread" influence. These hate groups do comprise only a small number of people, and I agree that they constitute "a deranged fringe of an American subculture." Still, the groups are real, and the subculture that generates them is equally real, and it ought not to be dismissed or written off as some psychopathological aberration. This is borne out by the ADL's report *Poisoning the Web*, and by the literature of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Center for New Community, to name but a few of the many national organizations and community groups that monitor the activities of hate groups. And it is borne out by what happened in Bloomington, and not only in Bloomington. Hate groups are a disturbingly palpable, objective phenomenon. The advantage of well-written hate-crimes laws is that under certain circumstances they make these organizations the legitimate subjects of criminal law enforcement and that the elevated penalties they prescribe make it very costly for individuals to act on their hatred by doing violence to the property and/or

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persons of targeted minority groups.

There are legitimate civil liberties concerns about such laws, though serious organizations, most notably the ADL, have sought to address them in their model legislation. But it is simply not true that the targets of such legislation—hate crimes—are nebulous, subjective experiences. The principal targets of hate-crimes legislation are organized forms of hostility and the violence that these directly promote. There is a politics behind this legal discourse about hate crimes. It is a politics fraught with the dangers of one-upmanship and competitive vulnerability. But it is a serious politics not reducible to these, and it uses the law as one strategy among others to address a very real and frightening social and political phenomenon: the organizations that use money, media, and weapons to aid and abet the murderous actions of people like Benjamin Smith.

I am sometimes asked why we in Bloomington United have been making such an issue of hate. My answer is simple. We have not chosen to make an issue of hate. Hate has chosen to come to Bloomington and it has made an issue of us. Responding to hate is by no means the only thing worth doing, but it is important to do it. ●

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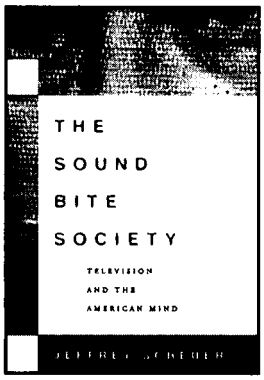

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Carte Blanche, Bête Noire

Susan George

YOU'RE SITTING there reading *Dissent* in the new millennium and I'm sitting here at the end of September 1999 with *carte blanche* from the editors: "Say what you like." Easy enough for them—but what happened on the way to 2000? Has the now-teetering stock market crashed, putting 1929 to shame? Did the much-touted Y2K bug actually pounce or did it turn out to be an insignificant insect? What did the assembled worthies finally place on the negotiating agenda of my *bête noire*, the World Trade Organization? Or did mass protest by people in Seattle and worldwide at the end of November prevent the WTO from having any agenda at all?

I run on tea, not tea leaves and I won't try to second-guess the new century. But even without a crystal ball, the relentless march of globalization is crystallizing both my hopes and my fears.

The hopes first. My vantage point is France, then Europe, only distantly the United States. Although most European countries are now nominally socialist, the Blairs and the Schroeders are widely seen by progressives here as trying to paint a social-democratic glaze on the same old Thatcherite or Kohlist policies. As for France, confronted with the downsizing of 7,500 French employees of the venerable and symbolic French transnational tire company Michelin (profit increase this year: 17.8 percent), Prime Minister Lionel Jospin announced on television that governments can't actually do much about the economy. He suggested that the downsized "mobilize."

Thousands are, and not just over such immediate, anxiety-ridden issues as job losses. They seem finally to be taking matters into their own hands and deciding that they will not passively accept globalization and all its works. It used to be axiomatic that you couldn't get "ordinary people" excited about international questions, yet the hottest topic of "la rentrée" (the post-holiday period when everyone "re-enters" the city and real life) is turning out to be the World Trade Organization.

A bit of background on the triggering factor in France: the United States and Canada lodged a complaint against Europe at the WTO because it refused to import growth-hormone-fed U.S. beef. The Americans won their case, despite the fact that even some U.S. scientists say that the food safety issue here is a very tough call; whereas European scientists in their finding for the European Union claim that at least one of the hormones used, 17-beta estradiol, is carcinogenic.

This fight is, however, about more than just *entrecôtes*. It poses the question of scientific "truth," since human biology isn't like, say, astronomy, and it may take time before carcinogenic impact shows up. Even more to the point for those who oppose the WTO is its complete lack of respect for the "precautionary principle" which states that the burden of proof ought to lie with the United States to prove that its beef is safe—not with Europe to prove that it isn't. Deep philosophical and ethical questions are involved—but not for the WTO. This organization, in all its decisions, refuses discrimination between similar goods from members countries. A product is a product, period, and the WTO does not want to hear about how it was produced, by whom, nor under what conditions. This is why no labor or environmental standards can be invoked, with only goods proven to have been produced by prison labor excepted.

In any event, Europe has stood firm, refusing to apply the World Trade Organization's ruling to allow this beef into our shops and onto our plates. Consequently, under the WTO pro-

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visions of "cross retaliation," the United States slapped 100 percent duties on various European foodstuffs, including *foie gras*, Dijon mustard, and the prince among cheeses, Roquefort.

Retaliating against the retaliation, members of the progressive small-farmers organization la Confédération Paysanne duly dismantled a McDonald's building site as the symbol of all things American, thus getting themselves thrown in jail, not to mention huge media coverage. Their charismatic leader, Roquefort producer José Bové, has a luxuriant Asterix mustache and political savvy to match. Refusing to post bail until it was supplied by international [including American small farmer] solidarity, Bové has become a national hero. Horrible as the French may find hormone-fed beef in the absolute (even if Americans don't seem to mind it) it has at least made every French citizen aware of, and wary of, the WTO.

The French Campaign for Citizen Oversight of the WTO is now umbrella for over seventy member organizations from widely differing backgrounds—trade unions, environment, human rights, feminism, North-South solidarity, farmers, consumers, teachers, cultural professions, and other constituencies are amply represented. An anti-WTO appeal with whiffs of 1789 rhetoric has just been published and signed by 125 "personalities," including internationally famous ones like actresses Jeanne Moreau and Juliette Binoche. They are demanding a moratorium on negotiations pending a thorough review by a world peoples' assembly.

In other words, people are revolting against faceless, antidemocratic, corporate-friendly bureaucracies and the WTO, along with the transnational corporations that support it, is rapidly becoming the epitome of all you love to hate.

ATTAC, the Association for a Transactions Tax in Aid of Citizens, is another new factor on the European scene. Founded in France in 1998 to advocate taxation of international capital to help poor citizens here and in the third world, it has now broadened its mandate to include campaigning on the WTO as well. In France ATTAC has more than 12,000 individual members (including a group of a hundred in parliament) with 50-some new ones joining every day. It is spreading to other European countries including Belgium, Holland, and Italy.

The victory last year against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment has provided momentum; people with often quite different politics have grown used to working together and have a genuine sense that they can win if they stay united. Young people who were nowhere to be found a few years ago are also joining these campaigns in droves.

It's not just France or Europe. Over eleven hundred organizations from eighty-seven countries had, as of September 15, signed a statement demanding a moratorium on WTO negotiations with a thorough assessment to follow. Wherever I travel, I find new energies rising to meet the challenge of globalization. International coalitions are burgeoning with electronic speed and people sense that they are engaged in an epic battle for civilization and freedom against barbarism and tyranny. Suddenly, one can actually use such words again; reasons to hope are manifold and manifest.

BUT THAT'S also where my fears come in. I sense that the very nature of politics is changing as globalization alters the face of society. For centuries, the central political question was hierarchy, or where you stood on the social ladder. From the king to the beggar, everyone knew his place (*her* place was only too well defined) and the whole social fabric depended on granting favors to those below you while seeking them from those above.

After the great national bourgeois revolutions, the central political question shifted to something closer to pie-sharing. Although matters of rank and position were clearly not eliminated, politics had to deal primarily with arbitration between competing groups. Economic growth was supposed to increase the size of the pie; governments were to deal with handing out requisite slices through taxation and redistribution. Citizens noisily engaged in contesting present shares and in convincing their representatives that a different allocation would be not only welcome but fairer. Thus did the welfare state prosper.

Globalization now seems well on the way to destroying the classic welfare state and is

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leading us toward a politics of the third kind—not at all the same thing as the third way. The primary question it asks is neither "Who occupies what rank on the social ladder?" nor "Who gets the juiciest slices of the pie?" but "Who has a right to survive and who does not?"

This question seems, at least to me, suddenly relevant because, from a purely mathematical point of view, globalization can't include everyone and is, in fact, leaving more and more people out. Huge and growing income disparities in virtually all countries are well documented. Globalization pushes wealth and power upward, from the bottom to the top of society. It is simply the nature of the beast to take the best and leave the rest. The political bottom line is that it has absolutely no plans for "the rest."

When capital deserts the "emerging markets" it leaves human disaster in its wake. Half the Mexican population now lives below the poverty line, famine is returning to Indonesia, life expectancy for males in Russia has dropped seven years in a decade—a phenomenon unprecedented in the twentieth century. Most people get little benefit when volatile capital is abundant, but they suffer when it is brutally withdrawn.

Rich counties are not immune: forty-five million Americans have no health insurance and nearly as many are classed as poor in the EU, that supposed bastion of the welfare state. As for the third world, it is now a privilege to be exploited: at least it means you have a job.

From the earliest times, human beings have for better or for worse organized their collective lives around a political project. The economy was only a part of it, subject to its dictates. Some of these projects were repugnant, including slavery or serfdom, but at least they set themselves above the economy. Society, not the market, made the rules, however awful those rules might have been.

For the first time in history, the minority dictating political truth proclaims that the market is not merely a means but a political end in itself. It is self-regulating and we should trust it, in its wisdom, to ensure optimum resource allocation—whether of manufactured, natural, financial or human resources. Profit will measure economic efficiency, and all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds if only the market is allowed to get on with its political task.

And yet, as Karl Polanyi recognized more than half a century ago, the market, left to itself, will destroy society and ensure the demise of countless individuals who contribute nothing either as consumers or as producers. I fear it is only a matter of time before such people are tacitly or explicitly declared superfluous, useless, and unworthy of notice.

Meanwhile, the world's population is growing and more prospective losers are born every day. If politics cannot transcend the market; if it cannot place society above the economy and become more democratic worldwide in order to ensure the survival of the "superfluous," the "useless," then the twenty-first century may equal even the twentieth in barbarism and cruelty.

This is why it is urgent to defeat antidemocratic international institutions like the WTO and start working on instating international democracy—just as our ancestors did on the national scale. We need to tax international capital and redistribute it—just as happened a century ago with graduated income taxes. This redistribution needs to be overseen not just by a greatly discredited United Nations but also by new institutions combining the skills of all segments of society including, yes, business, which has a role to play so long as it's not trying to play *all* the roles.

In other words, everything, or nearly, remains to be done. We are heading toward a new kind of "creative destruction" and it's actually a great time to be politically alive. ●

SUSAN GEORGE is associate director of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam and president of the *Observatoire de la Mondialisation* (Globalization Observatory), Paris. Her most recent book is *The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the 21st Century*.

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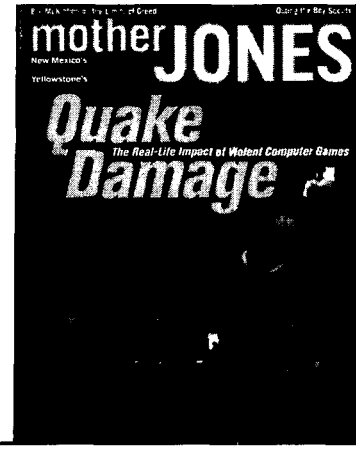

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Russia as a Postmodern Society

Boris Kapustin

THE AUGUST 1998 financial crash and its aftermath shattered all conventional schemes for explaining Russian postcommunism. The latter can hardly be viewed any longer as an instance of "modernization" or "transition" (however hazardous) from something blameworthy or undeveloped to something laudable or mature. The August crisis revealed that policies and strategies based on the idea of "transition" have not worked. Or, better perhaps, they "worked," but brought about the results opposite to those they were expected to yield. "What went wrong in Russia?"—this is the popular question these days; it expresses a new awareness of Russia's "times of trouble."

But this question does not provide a sufficiently radical departure from the modernization/transition schemes. It still suggests that there is a *right course* of development, which *should be* followed, all current deviations from it notwithstanding. To this question and to all it implies politically I want to oppose another question, namely, "What is happening after the disintegration of Soviet modernity?" The latter question switches our attention from the laws of history to actual historical events and from uniformity to diversity—from the anticipation of some single modernity to the analysis of multiple modernities. I want to look at Russian postcommunism as a version of *postmodernity* —since it was brought about by the collapse of a distinctive version of modernity known as "Soviet Communism."

The emergence of a postmodern condition should not be understood as "an advance over the modern one" (Zygmunt Bauman). Were it so, the logic of progress would be preserved, thus making impossible the appearance of postmodernity as something genuinely different from modernity. This is important to keep in mind if we are to understand Russian postmodernity, which represents an astonishing regression in comparison with both its Soviet past and all internationally accepted standards of modern life. But this certainly cannot disqualify Russian postcommunism as a postmodern condition.

Postmodernity can be interpreted benevolently as modernity turned reflectively to its own foundations and (presumably) capable of transforming them. Perhaps this mode of (self-) transformation is actually or (some time in the future) may be exemplified in certain contemporary societies. However, Soviet modernity belongs to a different type. It has exhibited little capacity for self-reflection and its conversion into postmodernity occurred in a different way. Soviet modernity slid into its postmodern condition through a series of events that had very little, or nothing at all, to do with those modes of transformation familiar to us from modern history—revolutions from below, reforms from above, wars of national liberation, conquests by foreign powers, and so on. None of these events took place. When something like them seemed to happen—Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms from above, known as *perestroika*—it turned out to be a shocking failure.

Probably the most appropriate metaphor to capture the nature of the Soviet slide into postmodernity is Jean Baudrillard's "implosion." The modern institutional structures that "implode," that is, explode inwardly, are more likely to lose their meaning than to collapse physically, although the latter may happen as well. Quite often the institutions simply become "unfamiliar," both to their staff and to outsiders, and are no longer recognized by them. Institutional practices begin to parody themselves, and then this parody turns into the ac-

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tual mode of their continued existence.

The markers of implosion are clear now. The so-called August 1991 putsch turned the repressive organs of Soviet totalitarianism into jovial participants in a fantastic carnival that seemed to be masterminded by Mikhail Bakhtin rather than by the actual members of the grotesque junta. The dissolution of the "evil empire" is another example of the same kind. First, those who were reluctant to leave the empire (like the former Central Asian republics) had to be "forced to be free"; then those who yearned for independence (Chechnya) had to be repressed. Forcing some to leave and forcing some to stay, this is not an incomprehensible paradox. In fact, the two are equally legitimate manifestations of the imploded power of the center that produces agony and convulsions on the (former?) periphery.

ANOTHER FEAT of implosion and parody was provided by the sweeping voucher denationalization of the Soviet state-owned property. Officially, this operation was meant to put into practice Margaret Thatcher's utopia of a "society of proprietors" and to boost economic efficiency. Needless to say, neither of these objectives was achieved by this swindle of incredible proportions. National labor productivity, the key indicator of economic efficiency, fell in comparison with the Soviet past by more than one-third, and the last hope for the emergence of a "society of proprietors" was irredeemably destroyed by the August crash.

Parodies and implosions can be brutally oppressive. This is how they are experienced whenever they are inescapably actual, whenever they are not limited, as in the contemporary West, to the realm of sensibility and to "a generation for whom scarcity seems remote, a generation preoccupied with liberty rather than necessity" (Pauline Rosenau). When postmodernity is real, or is the dominant component of reality, it is hardly compatible with liberty, but only with the licentiousness of those who are suitably positioned in the *danse macabre* of the exploitation and impoverishment of everyone else.

The slide into postmodernity means the collapse of modern life. What emerges instead is a world of simulacra, of free-floating signifiers detached from what they once signified. This is exactly what has happened in Russia in most domains of its national life.

Take, for example, the domain of politics and such a pivotal simulacrum as the Russian Federation. To begin with, the Federation has no (legal) reality whatsoever. Its supreme legislative body by a vote of 250 to 98 on March 15, 1996, renounced the earlier abrogation of the treaty that established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, thus proclaiming that the USSR still exists and that Russia is an illegitimate state. However, this did not and does not bother its citizens, because neither the "new Russia" nor such a pillar of democracy as the Russian Parliament is taken seriously. Can people have any other attitude toward a parliament that adopts laws that blatantly contradict the federal constitution? Can they regard with respect a state whose sovereignty and independence are mocked by the existence of other sovereign and independent states on its territory? (Chechnya is not the only example of such paradoxes.) Was not the importance of the constitution undermined by the president himself, who sponsored the conclusion of the dubious Federal Treaty meant to be the foundational document of the federal state? Was not this treaty devalued in its turn by forty "exclusive treaties" concluded separately between the Kremlin and different regions of the country? So what is the Russian Federation after all this but a free-floating signifier detached from whatever is associated in modernity with a state, whether fully sovereign or something less?

Consider the economy and the market-oriented reforms. According to the president, these reforms have been carried out unceasingly for nearly a decade. The infrastructure of the market, including such key institutions as private property in capital goods, commercial banking, convertibility of national currency, unregulated trade in most articles of public and private consumption, and so on, has been practically completed. This was confirmed internationally by the removal of Russia from the blacklist of nations with nonmarket economies (July 1998). Yet with all these achievements, two-thirds of total national production continues to be realized outside the sphere of money

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circulation; 73 percent of all transactions in the real economy take place on the basis of barter, because of the unreliability of market institutions and the desire to hide revenues and basic assets from criminal extortions. The most primitive forms of subsistence economy have been revived and flourish all over the country, serving as a source of survival for at least forty-two million people, the 29 percent of the population who find themselves beneath the official poverty line.*

It is not enough to say that "market-oriented reforms" actually shrank the monetarized economy and expanded modes of production that are conventionally identified as "premodern," "precapitalist," or "archaic." These "reforms" also undermined such a critical cornerstone of capitalism as wage labor. What is known in Russia as "arrears on wages" means, in fact, that wage labor has to a very large extent been replaced by *corvée* or serf labor. This phenomenon contributed importantly to the single most impressive result of the market-oriented reforms—the drop in the proportion of wages to gross domestic product from 49 percent in 1990 to around 18 percent to 20 percent in 1998. The drop continued at a faster pace after the August crash. From January 1998 to January 1999 national production went down by 4.5 percent, whereas the average real wage plummeted by 40 percent. During 1999 real incomes probably fell further by 15 percent to 18 percent—this time despite a modest growth of industrial output.

It would be optimistic and naive, however, to think that the rhetoric of market-oriented reforms disseminated by "democratic reformers" and accepted by communists as a reality they pretend to struggle against is just a whirlpool of signifiers referring to nothing real. If we understand reality as the result of the social processes accepted as normal in a specific context, then we can grasp how "market-oriented" rhetoric, although mirroring nothing, helps to shape and sustain the postmodern reality of Russia.

First of all, despite its intellectual poverty, this rhetoric has proven its efficiency as a method of deconstructing all alternatives. The elimination of alternatives is a crucial dimension of the (Russian) postmodern condition; namely, the closure of the future and of history. Nothing is available but the present, which, it goes without saying, has to be "improved." The mood stemming from the elimination of alternatives is widespread enough in Russia to have secured Boris Yeltsin's re-election in 1996, and this after the catastrophic war in Chechnya and after his conspicuous failure to keep any of the promises he made in 1990-1991 and later. This mood was brilliantly, although involuntarily, evoked by Martin Malia in the conclusion to an article in *Journal of Democracy* (April 1999): "The only possible policy has been tried, and it didn't work, or at least didn't work in the way anticipated. . . . At the same time . . . it is clear that someday, in some form, Russia will have to resume active marketization and privatization." According to one nationwide poll, 34 percent of Yeltsin's supporters said that they could not "adapt themselves to the new life." Still, they did support his "course of reforms" because they "rejected the possibility of going backwards" and no other alternatives except this unacceptable one were visible. These people decided the outcome of the struggle in 1996!

Second, "market-oriented" rhetoric has shaped and circumscribed the political and ideological reaction of the opposition, rendering it impotent. Today communists and other opponents of the government focus only on the pace, scope, and "grounds" of privatization, on the forms of the division of power, on social rights *vis-à-vis* civil and political rights, on the structure of the Federation, and on the problems of the Commonwealth of Independent States. It never struck the leaders of the opposition that discussing all these matters is meaningless inasmuch as the subjects of these discussions—private property, political power, social and other rights, Federation, and so on—have already "imploded."

The only way to change things is to escape from the postmodern condition, to remove its basic prerequisites and constituents. Theoreti-

*I take these figures from an essay by Lev Makarevitch, "Year 1998: The Bankruptcy of the Russian Financial-Economic System," which appeared in *Obshchestvo i Ekonomika (Society and Economy)*, No. 10-11 (1998) p.36.

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cally these are well-known: the fusion of public and private, unbounded privatization of individual concerns, the collapse of political representation, the "death of the subject" resulting in subjectless individualism. All this, however, has been completely overlooked by the communists and the other major opponents of the "democratic reformers," partly because of their vulgar Marxist intellectual background, which made them insensitive to issues of this kind, and partly because their own constituency embraces individuals who are more thoroughly privatized than the rank and file of Yeltsin's camp. After all, opinion polls indicate that among the supporters of the communist leader Gennadii Zyuganov, 60 percent believe material well-being to be of supreme importance, whereas political liberty is thought to be less valuable. Among Yeltsin's supporters only 30 percent share this opinion.

But the incapacity of the opposition to put forward a political agenda focused on de-postmodernizing the country should also be attributed to the unprecedented novelty of the problem. Never and nowhere but in Russia has the task of de-postmodernization emerged so far as the sine qua non of national survival. Never and nowhere has the potential for anger created by the appalling degradation of national life been so efficiently defused as it has been in Russia. Observers should be perplexed by Russia's amazing political tranquility in circumstances that would bring explosion to any modern nation. What can the opposition do if people are reluctant to protest after their average real wage has been reduced to eighty dollars a month?

Massive popular protests have not been brought about either by declining life expectancy; the dramatic degradation of national health care, social security, and education; the apparent defenselessness of the country (of the 1.2 million members of the Russian armed forces, fewer than 100,000 are combat ready); shortages of electricity and hot water; or rampant crime. Only 3 percent of the adult population of the country took part in any kind of strike in 1996-1998; only 6 percent can imagine themselves participating in politically oriented actions (and only a negligible minority of this small group did in fact participate). At the same time, only 8 percent of the nation believes that the course of reform serves "the interests of the majority."

If all these familiar modern causes of unrest and all the methods of political mobilization based on them don't seem to operate in the postmodern condition, what can be said about postmodern politics? Its central elements—ironic detachment, fluid coalitions and temporary issue-oriented alliances, ideological pastiche, the affirmation of local customs and practices at the expense of vast projects, and so on—serve in Russia to reproduce postmodernity rather than to resist it. Ironic detachment, for example, is exactly what characterizes political attitudes of those 70 percent to 80 percent of voters who systematically ignore the local elections that have been taking place in different regions of the country since 1996. Irony proves to be good for nothing, its only practical result being the consolidation of power by local autocrats. Like most postmodernists, these autocrats wish to abandon the universal (federal law) and are strongly in favor of local customs and practices ranging from polygamy in this region to Soviet-style collectivism in that one. As for the fluidity of coalitions, it is not easy to find in Russia coalitions that are not fluid. The Communist Party is one of very few exceptions. But this party is still strikingly postmodern in other respects, for example, in its ideology, which is a wonderful pastiche of Leninism, Russian Orthodox piety, liberal parliamentarism, and visionary "postindustrialism" reminiscent of the nearly forgotten writings of those whom the ideological guardians of the party used to call "bourgeois sociologists."

Postmodern politics may have some critical edge when it confronts the still predominantly modern reality of the West. After all, despite the proliferation of all kinds of "post," hardly anybody speaks seriously about the implosion of capitalism, or the Central Intelligence Agency, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Postmodern politics loses its critical edge completely when it finds itself in the real environment of postmodernity. Perhaps the single most important difference between Russia and the West is (following Craig

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Calhoun) that in the West modernity is still so diverse that what is called postmodernity is really a subtype of the modern, whereas for Russia the opposite is true.

If this analysis is correct, several conclusions follow. Some of them are negative, pointing to what cannot happen in Russia as long as its postmodernity prevails. Some are positive, addressing in a tentative way the question of what can be done to liberate Russia from postmodernity.

The negative conclusions are as follows:

- The spontaneous development of Russia will never be able to transform its present criminal capitalism into a productive capitalism. In Russia, capitalism turned out to be a product of postmodernity rather than modernity. This is why it manifests irresponsibility, contempt for universal law and morality, and a loss of "productivist" orientation. If we compare it with what still prevails in the West, we will find a difference in types of capitalism rather than in stages of evolution of one and the same entity. These differences will not disappear spontaneously. They cannot be removed except by a political will realized in concrete revolutionary actions.
- Procedural democracy, even if brought to formal perfection, cannot by itself produce or facilitate the radical changes that Russia needs. The outputs of procedural democracy will not be substantially different from its inputs. If the inputs consist of ironic detachment, apathy, corruption, and frustration, then no other outputs can be expected than the forms that political power takes in Russia today. But what passes for power in Russia today (that is, imploded power) is first of all impotence in everything necessary for the functioning of the state and second, a kind of Foucaultian omnipresence that seduces, cripples, and tarnishes all independent initiatives, all forms of autonomous life. Unless the electorate re-establishes itself as a "people"—as it managed to do in 1989-1991—unless the capacity for political action beyond voting is regained, elections in Russia will have little significance except for the personal careers of the members of the political class. I think this will prove to be true for the 1999 parliamentary and for the 2000 presidential elections.
- No matter how long the turmoil in Russia lasts, no return to communism can occur. By the same token, no other alternative to the present condition looks practicable in the foreseeable future. This has little to do with the laws of history or the imperatives of modernization, but much to do with the absence of political subjects capable of willing such alternatives (the difference between "willing" and "longing for" should not be neglected). The dilemma "democrats or communists" has long since become obsolete. Both these forces complement one another as perpetuators of Russian postmodernity. What is tragic about Russia is that forces that make for modernity are either missing from its political arena or too weak to shape its history.

WHAT CAN be done in order to make Russia less inhospitable to change? Here we come to my tentative positive conclusions:

- The cultural-ideological battle against the closure of the future has to be joined. It must be demonstrated that possibility did not disappear from history after the collapse of Soviet Communism, that there really are alternatives to "the only possible policy" of Yeltsin's regime, and that these are worth struggling for. This means that the dilemma "market or nonmarket" is intellectually shallow and politically harmful; it has to be replaced by the problem of choosing politically among different types of capitalism and different modes of linkage to other spheres of society.
- Every occasion, however insignificant, should be used to practice resistance to Russian postmodernity. To defend a neighborhood park from being turned into a construction site for the villas of the nouveaux riches, even if the chances of success are slim, is a good example of such an occasion. To insist that exposed corrupt officials be ousted, even though they are likely to be replaced at the present juncture by no less corrupt colleagues, is another. The aggregation of social forces and the experience of collective resistance are more important than the achievement of immediate material results, for the aggregation and experience might eventually produce what some sociologists call the "return of the actor."

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• This development might also generate new interest in the practice of civil disobedience. At the moment it may be premature to discuss this possibility in greater detail. Nonetheless, I want to conclude by suggesting that in the context of postmodernity civil disobedience is likely to have several distinctive characteristics. Today in Russia disobedience in the forms of contempt for, or evasion of, the law, has become nearly universal. And so *civil* disobedience, in the first place, represents a defiance of the general mode of uncivil disobedience that is now the true modus operandi of the postmodern condition. In the second place, and even more important, civil disobedience is a way of fighting for a new social and political order—one that we can rightly call just and rational, therefore, legitimate and post-postmodern. •

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The Tattooed Generation

Salvadoran Children Bring Home American Gang Culture

Gabrielle Banks

MARTHA AND la Shadow are talking about sex. Martha is sitting beside me on the steps of a suburban apartment complex in San Salvador with her four-month-old baby girl in her lap. La Shadow sits across from us in a lawn chair, gazing into a pocket mirror and dabbing on fresh lipstick. I ask Martha if kids here use protection. "I could never get Bullet to use condoms. I was getting the shot," she says, referring to the Depo Provera injection. "But then we stopped, and . . ." she trails off, stroking her daughter's hair. "Having a kid is really hard for us now. We don't have money for rent or electricity, so it's even harder with a kid."

La Shadow smiles when Martha asks how it's going with her boyfriend. "I was with him last night," she says.

"Are you taking pills?" Martha asks.

"Nah. My man keeps saying he wants to have a little girl."

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. I can't have kids."

La Shadow is tall and dark, with wavy hair. She dresses like a typical urban American high school student, though she has never set foot in the United States. Recently, she has taken an interest in computers and spends hours, body motionless, fingers clicking away, at the terminal of an ancient Mac II at an office in this building complex. What jars with the wholesome image is the dark blue scrawl on the concave part of her chin. It says "Tiny Locos," the name of the *mara*, the gang she belongs to. This tattoo is not the only mark gang life has left on the willowy seventeen-year-old. When I ask, she shows me, nonchalantly, the scar near her navel where a catheter was attached for several months to hold her excrement. La Shadow recently survived a wound inflicted by a rival gang—a gunshot to the breast that ripped downward through her internal organs. Pregnancy is a moot point; Shadow can never have children.

Inside the building complex, Martha's boyfriend, Bullet, is hanging out in the apartment that has been converted into the office of Homies Unidos, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) whose goal is to end youth violence in El Salvador. Bullet is spindly and agile. He moves in jumps and starts as if pursued by an indecisive mob. Rumor has it he got his nickname because he moves so fast, not because he is quick with a trigger. Bullet's secret weapon is an electric smile, but he tends to scare off strangers because he has

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the numbers 1 and 8 tattooed on his earlobes. Bullet belongs to 18th Street, a well-known Los Angeles street gang that has planted a seedling in El Salvador. Eighteenth Street and its rival Mara Salvatrucha reinitiated their battles on Salvadoran soil after the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began deporting convicted gang members back to their native lands in the early 1990s. Bullet is now a street ambassador who translates the history and politics of *la vida loca* into rap lyrics. Both he and Martha grew up in Los Angeles before returning to El Salvador a few years ago. Bullet was deported; Martha's family, ironically, sent her back to prevent her from succumbing to the allure of LA gang culture. They met and fell in love on the streets of San Salvador.

Bullet darts over to where the young women are chatting and lifts the baby out of Martha's lap with one and a half arms. At age nineteen, Bullet blew off the end of his arm with a homemade grenade while high on crack and alcohol. Third world gangs, unlike their "developed" counterparts, often lack the proper equipment for drive-by shootings and other forms of urban warfare. Consequently, some of the worst casualties result from amateur weapons. What remains of Bullet's injury is a poorly healed, bony stub a few inches below his elbow—evidence of the hatchety treatment he says gang members receive in public hospitals. If his body had not been covered in tattoos, Bullet says, he would have been tended to right away and his arm could have been saved.

Bullet, Martha, and la Shadow are protagonists of a lesser-known chapter in Central American history. They are casualties of a war that has not captured the same international attention as the devastating civil war their parents experienced in the 1980s. Yet because it is a war between "have nots," the combat seems all the more bitter and senseless. The irony stings: this is what refugee ambassadors have brought back from their fortuitous escape to the land of milk and honey, baseball and apple pie. Gang members arrive home doubly disadvantaged: less fluent in Spanish and tradition, and more cocky about basic human rights that they expect will be protected.

Peace accords ended the civil war in 1992, but—because of widespread poverty and U.S. deportation of refugee felons—the level of street violence in El Salvador has risen dramatically. Many, like Bullet and la Shadow, suffer a new style of war wounds. In casual conversation, they will lift up a shirt or a cap to reveal scars on their bellies, backs, scalp, or hands. In one of his rap songs, *Frutos de la guerra*, Bullet dubs his generation "war fruit." His lyrics reveal how violent spirits have blossomed from the seeds of war, exile, and neglect, offering a raw account of contemporary Salvadoran history.

In the course of the civil war, an estimated seventy-five thousand Salvadorans (mostly civilians) died, and over one million fled the country. Some refugees went to neighboring Honduras, but a large percentage fled to Los Angeles and other U.S. cities. Meanwhile, the U.S. government steadily contributed to the war, providing over one billion dollars in military aid to the Salvadoran government between 1980 and 1992.

The war, exile, and loss broke many families apart. For the most part, those who sought refuge in Los Angeles settled in poor neighborhoods and never fully adapted to the language and culture that surrounded them. They didn't have the time or resources to address their grief or nurture their children. Parents worked long hours at minimum-wage jobs and spent little time at home with their families.

Like many immigrant kids, Salvadorans felt a linguistic and cultural gap between themselves and their parents. Their neighborhoods were already war zones, divided up and marked with graffiti by the street gangs who claimed their ownership. According to the neighborhoods their families settled in, many kids joined 18th Street, a Chicano gang, or la Mara Salvatrucha, a Salvadoran gang, in search of protection, respect, identity, good times, and the comfort of family. They started sporting baggy clothes. They learned about sex, drugs, and violence. They earned tattoos as rites of passage. They racked up arrests, criminal records, and prison time. And then, while the streets of Los Angeles burst into a collective

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rage following the Rodney King verdict, in their tropical homeland peace was declared.

Not everyone heard the news. But almost instantly, INS policy toward Salvadorans changed. In essence, they were no longer "refugees," and, as mere "immigrants," they were more likely to be deported. At the same time, in the wake of the Rodney King unrest, the LAPD beefed up its efforts to stop gang violence. Governor Pete Wilson, bolstered by a contagion of anti-immigrant sentiment, won reelection in 1994 by backing citizen initiatives that denied education, health care, and social services to the undocumented and put three-time offenders permanently behind bars. Thus, young Salvadoran convicts with gang ties began an involuntary pilgrimage back to their childhood home.

Weasel, an iconoclastic punk rocker and tattoo artist from North Hollywood's Westside los Crazys, is now a trusted bookkeeper for Homies Unidos in San Salvador. He left El Salvador at five and returned via deportation at age twenty-five. "It was like out of the blue. They took my papers away. Shot me down here to El Salvador," he tells me. After completing a twenty-six-month sentence for weapons possession, he was released into INS custody and sent to a detention center in San Pedro. "From there," he says, "they sent me here, to this prison," referring to El Salvador. "I thought I was a permanent resident, but not so permanent, you know?"

I MADE TWO visits to El Salvador in 1998. Both times I flew on United Airlines from Los Angeles; both times uniformed INS officials guarded the walkway down to the plane. And both times I learned that there were deportees on board. Frequent travelers of this route verify that it is quite common to be accompanied by deportees on daily commercial flights from LAX to San Salvador. Many of these reluctant voyagers have not set foot in El Salvador since they were small children, and will begin their new lives homeless, friendless, and jobless.

Most deportees like Weasel and Bullet cannot legally return to the United States for five to twenty years. They are unfamiliar with Salvadoran culture, many don't speak much Spanish, their educations are stunted, and their parents and even their young children live in exile. Weasel was scared by reports he had heard—underground mumblings about right-wing vigilantes. "I'd heard stories that they kill people like me." Throughout the expatriate Salvadoran community, relatives gathered news of a death squad called *la sombra negra*, or Black Shadow, that preyed on tattoed kids. Black-ink tattos signified prison time, and the leftover death squads operated under the extremist philosophy that society needed to expunge itself of its "evils" at any cost. "They would find out where you live, knock on your door, and drag you out and shoot you right there," Weasel says.(Human rights workers confirm *la sombra negra*'s violent attacks, although they are not officially acknowledged by the government.)

If you didn't encounter *la sombra negra*, you certainly couldn't escape the pervasive scorn Salvadorans retain towards the tattooed generation. If you have a tattoo, many young people verify, you can't get a job. If your tattoo is hidden and your employer finds out about it, you lose your job.

Deportees like Weasel and Bullet get off the plane and have nowhere to go. It doesn't take long to discover that along with *cholo*-style dress, drugs, music, and weapons, gang life has been deported full-scale to El Salvador. Most deportees aren't kids anymore, but El Salvador offers them few adult options.

Drug peddling is a common alternative. Self-styled alchemists make crack in local labs; dealers push it widely and openly in the face of law enforcement who are otherwise occupied rounding up violent criminals.

Those who don't have family reunite with their homeboys and homegirls from Virginia Street, Lennox, 18th Street, Mara Salvatrucha, and Crazy Riders. Meanwhile, to the "war fruit" who never left El Salvador, gang life and gang-speak is cooler than Michael Jordan. There is not much hope for poor kids in the postwar era, least of all from their deflated parents, many of whom sided with the leftist FMLN. Those who have lived in Los Angeles are venerated as a new tier of gang nobility. But most active gangsters today have never left El Salvador.

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I'm in El Salvador at the invitation of my friend Magdaleno "Papa Bear" Rose-Avila, who helped found Homies Unidos. Magdaleno is a charismatic Chicano activist with thirty years of human rights organizing under his belt. He organized farm workers with César Chavez, he headed the Peace Corps in Guatemala and Nicaragua during the turbulent war years, and later directed the West Coast Amnesty International campaign to end the death penalty in the United States. When I met him, years later, he was the executive director of the César Chavez Foundation and I was a field organizer for the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO.

While waiting in the customs line in San Salvador, I begin a conversation with a couple of deportees from my flight. The younger, more roughed-up looking one perks up when I tell him I am in El Salvador to spend time with *pandilleros*, gangsters. Ringo meets me at the gate, and I tell him about the encounter. He offers the pimply-faced kid a ride. Ringo is a veteran of the California prison system who now directs Homies Unidos. He has great patience and tolerance behind an X-ray glare—a remnant of his hard time that wholly intimidated me when I first met him in January of 1998. Ringo keeps quiet while the twice-uprooted young man jabbers about his exploits. As soon as we drop him off, Ringo tells me that this kid must have spent his gang years in El Salvador and then dropped out of gang life in the United States. Why? He couldn't say where he hung out or what gang he claimed. Kids like this, Ringo tells me, get lots of mileage in their local *clika* by fabricating tales of adventure and adding to the LA gang lore. Before we arrive at Homies' headquarters, Magdaleno calls to say he's stranded in Florida because of Hurricane Mitch.

Magdaleno Rose-Avila learned about gang proliferation in El Salvador in 1996 from Donna DeCesare, an Emmy-award winning photographer who had covered the war and was now intimately aware of its aftermath. Rose-Avila had just relocated to San Salvador with his family for some reflective down time, when he became intrigued with the idea of teaching and implementing techniques of nonviolence with the "war fruit" generation.

Rose-Avila agreed to sit on El Salvador's permanent committee to prevent gang violence on behalf of Save the Children (USA), along with leaders from UNICEF and two dozen other agencies. He started hanging out with the *locos* informally, learning their *placazos* and their idiosyncrasies. Magdaleno a big man who combines a goofy sense of humor with brazen street smarts. Gang members initially viewed him as a foreigner and outsider of a different generation. Many also distrusted him as a Chicano, based on street and prison rivalries in the United States. It was months before Negro—the gang veteran who eventually became Homies Unidos' first president—would tell him his real name. Rose-Avila applied the technique Fred Ross used to organize a skeptical young César Chavez in the 1950s: he encouraged gang members to begin with data collection.

The pitch went like this: "We have a problem. The problem is people are lying about you to the media. You have to tell them the truth. But you can't just get up and tell them what gang members are like. What they want is raw data. You're going to design the questionnaire, analyze it, and explain it." It was all about grabbing hold of their own destinies again. A few gangsters took interest, and they began to work on spreading the word.

Rose-Avila had to plan meetings with different gangs on different days. He couldn't stagger his meetings by a few hours, because any overlap—a latecomer or an early arrival—could catalyze gunfire. He masterminded the first joint meeting, luring active gang members from different neighborhoods over to his house with the promise of free food—several buckets of Pollo Campero (the Central American equivalent of KFC) and Cokes. The homies thought he was stupid, Magdaleno says, but he knew their weakness for junk food. Rival gang members began to recognize the parallel roots of their anger and frustration.

The University of Central America's (UCA) Institute of Public Opinion agreed to train the assembled crowd in the science of data collection, since their own attempts at assessing the scope of gang violence had backfired.

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(UCA's social scientists had found it impossible to acquire trust or truthful responses from wary *pandilleros*.) The gangs decided to work together—though independently at first—to conduct a survey of gang members. The homeboys and homegirls attended trainings and received technical assistance in data collection at the UCA. Rose-Avila's vision was to refocus homies' natural organizing instincts with conflict resolution seminars and nonviolence trainings. (The Homies Unidos/UCA survey was eventually published in 1998 as a sleek 249-page paperback, which international journalists have used as a source of statistics on the new wave of gang culture.)

In the course of the next few months, under the guidance of Rose-Avila, Homies Unidos was born. The organization's stated purpose is to stop violence and to provide services to at-risk and gang youth. Homies is nonpartisan and nonreligious, and it has no formal relationship with unions or other longstanding institutions of the Salvadoran left. (Some Homies members affiliate with political or religious groups, but none of these connections are uniform across the membership.) In its day-to-day reality, Homies provides a safe place for young people with often dubious pasts to hang out together and to learn about the nuts and bolts of social change. Initially, Homies established headquarters in a vacant garage at Negro's pad. Early donations and volunteer gang youth kept the project financially afloat. In a matter of months, members of Homies Unidos were zapping news of their projects via e-mail to their sibling chapter in Los Angeles.

In the two years since its inception, Homies Unidos has moved far beyond the grim set of statistics its founders gathered. It is now a safe haven for rival gang members and a testing ground for social change. The San Salvador headquarters appears mundanely professional, with a steady ebb and flow of visitors, a capable staff, but still no reliable car. The small apartment-turned-office sits on neutral turf in the suburban hills of La Cima. Ringo and I trudge in, drenched in the span of a four-second walk from the taxi outside. My first day in town, to the sound of the hurricane's pummelling rain, the homies treat me to a communal lunch of "spread" with twelve members from five different gangs. "Spread" is a prison cuisine made of boiled ramen noodles mixed with canned tuna. For lack of dishware, the homeboys mix it and spread it out on top of an unused garbage bag. In El Salvador, Ringo proudly explains, "spread" is often eaten on thick corn tortillas. I find it compelling that those who have spent time in the United States harken back nostalgically to years of processed, freeze-dried food behind bars.

I spend the next ten days, at Magdaleno's request, following around various members of Homies Unidos to get an idea of the projects they are undertaking and the snags they tend to encounter. Homies encourages gang members to abandon the drugs and violence but not their pride, status, or identity. Most Homies members proudly introduce themselves by the nicknames they earned on the streets. These *placazos* can be in English or Spanish. They are purposely misspelled on walls and tattoos in a sort of defiant linguistic reappropriation. (All spellings have been retained in this article.)

Pansa Loca ("Crazy Belly"), an 18th Street veteran, partners up for his daily work with Fredy Cruger, a former rival from Mara Salvatrucha—unless Fredy sneaks off to see his new girlfriend. Pansa admits to a history of heavy drug use, violence, and general recklessness in Los Angeles and San Salvador before finding out about Homies Unidos. He takes me to see the *huelepegas* (glue sniffers) and crack addicts, and introduces me to the store owners in the city center whom he used to count on to give him food or money when he was strung out. Pansa, like the others, looks a bit scary at first—with his handlebar mustache and sumo wrestler physique. He is a helpless flirt, generous, effusive as a puppy dog, and simultaneously quick to ask for whatever he wants. Now, along with his leaner, more reserved sidekick, Pansa recruits help from the Ministry of Education to set up educational programs for Homies.

I run into Pansa one day as he pants up the back steps of the Route 5 bus, sweaty, with a green chalkboard, an eraser, and a box of

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chalk. While Fredy Cruger pays the fares, Pansa tells me how he convinced the government officials in a few minutes that Homies Unidos needed its new computer curriculum authorized—and, by the way, could he have a chalkboard? I smile. Pansa teaches a weekly computer class back at the office. He got his computer training under a grant for at-risk youth. Because of him, la Shadow, one of his most loyal, accomplished students, is career-bound. Homies has also offered English classes and workshops for craft trades like engraving and air-brushing, and job-training programs are next on the agenda.

El Shadow is having a hard time getting his team to wake up and show up promptly on the day I meet him in Modelo. This neighborhood, which borders on a polluted ravine, is Mara Salvatrucha turf. It's easy to lose morale, but Shadow is persistent. I go with him by minibus to Feo's place in San Marcos, a muddy, marginalized community in the hills. Feo is pulling on a pair of wet slacks his sister washed and hung up on the clothesline for him late last night. His uncle, who looks at least fifty, is hooked on crack. El Shadow, Negro, Spike, and Feo plan to survey a random sampling of their neighbors in high-crime areas, to ask whether they have seen violence and whether they are willing to be part of the solution.

El Shadow's new haircut reveals a blue smudge behind his ear covering up an outdated tattoo. El Shadow has his share of bullet holes in his belly. He still experiences back pain from time to time. After assorted arrests and incarcerations during his years in the United States, el Shadow is now in charge of violence prevention activities for Homies Unidos. He is a very convincing speaker, leaving several lawyers from the Foundation for the Study of Law and YMCA staffers in stunned silence as he effectively persuades them to alter the program of an upcoming forum on youth empowerment to include testimonials and videos on gang life. (Last summer, en route to an international violence prevention conference in Portugal, el Shadow was detained for a month in Florida on a mistaken weapons charge. He reportedly preached nonviolence and gained a few converts among the Cuban and Dominican prisoners in Dade County Jail.)

A few days later, la Huera ("Blondie") invites me along with her to see the Homies' immunization campaign in Ladina—a dusty alleyway in the heart of 18th Street turf. Like el Shadow, la Huera has created programs for Homies that respond to the voids she experienced on the street. In her gang-banging days, Huera saw several of her friends get shot and then sat with them in hospital waiting rooms for hours while they were systematically outtriaged by more traditionally dressed patients. With guts and instinct and no medical training, la Huera began performing street surgeries—removing bullets, soaking wounds with rubbing alcohol, and sewing them up with thread and needle. At first, she had poor thread choice. She didn't know about reconnecting each layer of skin. Painted eyebrows and all, she decided she wanted to be a doctor. She now attends nursing school in San Salvador and teaches STD/HIV prevention to her peers and the community at large. La Huera also coordinates all health programs for Homies Unidos.

On our visit to Ladina, la Huera rides in the back of a pickup truck with two homeboys, two uniformed nursing students, a box of medicine, and a box of second-hand clothes. (The nursing school supplies the medicine free of charge; the clothes come from Homies.) La Huera says that poverty and fear prevent most people in places like Ladina from ever approaching a clinic. Most don't even have their childhood shots.They need tetanus shots to prevent infection if they get poked with foreign objects—like bullets or knives. She sets up shop on the sidewalk in the shade. She calls people by their *placazos*, badgering them, "Don't tell me you're scared!" She offers free clothes to those who roll up their sleeves and take her up on her dare. I am taking a picture and she poses with her homegirls, giggling while she throws a gang sign—for old times' sake—in her Florence Nightingale uniform.

When the scruffy-looking homeboys begin to approach the open-air clinic, Sapo ("Toad"), a local boy, catches on and starts yelling at people to put down their crack pipes and come over and get a shot. He thumbs a plastic film

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canister in his jeans pocket every few seconds, then takes it out, puts it back, and counts a big wad of *colones*. Every few minutes, he pulls a tiny rock wrapped in tin foil out of the canister and hands it off to someone in exchange for a sweaty bill. A car with tinted windows drives by and I watch Sapo exchange money for goods. In Ladino, Sapo is more popular than the ice cream man. He seems to see no contradiction in the fact that today he's also helping his homegirl Huera distribute tetanus and rubella immunizations on the sidewalk where he runs his business. By the end of the day, Huera and her team have immunized thirty-three people and given away all the clothes.

BACK AT THE Homies office, Ringo is hosting a Spanish filmmaker who wants to make a documentary on gang violence. Ringo tries to convince him that it isn't enough just to highlight the problem; at this point Homies is prepared to document solutions. He is not intimidated by the man's accent or lofty vocabulary. Ringo quips that he got his high school diploma on the street, but he got his Ph.D. in prison.

That afternoon a flatbed full of young YMCA volunteers swings by the Homies office to pick up Weasel, Grumpy, and me to help collect food and supplies for the victims of the hurricane. Weasel and Grumpy are old prison buddies from California. They are two of the most well-mannered, cordial people I've met. The truck deposits us onto a grassy island surrounded by surging traffic. The volunteers shy away from hauling food boxes and bird-dogging donations on the bullhorn. Grumpy defies his hushed countenance and picks up the slack. Cars whiz by.

The government has responded to the disaster by deploying military units to all neighborhoods of the city. A roving six-person team of soldiers toting machine guns confronts me at the turn of a corner. I find myself staring. A soldier gazes back, eyebrows raised, as if to say, "This is for the public good. Why do you look so offended?" No one has seen or felt a military presence like this since the end of the war.

Weasel and I are recruited to help relocate a family left stranded in a shelter in Ciudad Delgado. A wall of loose mud was hovering above a group of already tenuous tin houses, the YMCA volunteer explains. If the occupants refused to evacuate, social services would take away their kids. If they evacuated, they would be homeless. The family we meet evacuated—but they have no relatives to take them in. Now they have outstayed their welcome in the local, makeshift shelter. Weasel brings along his spare mattress. The mother, grandmother, three kids and Miguelito, their rooster, are huddled on a bedsheet in the corner of a giant warehouse. We carry their worldly belongings (a dozen plastic supermarket bags) into the back of the truck. After they settle into their new temporary home (a storage room at the Y), we drive them to the local restaurant, a tin shack with a dirt floor and benches. While a roomful of off-duty policemen ogle at a parade of half-naked women on television, this family has their first solid meal of the day. Weasel has been living in exile for almost two years. He gazes at the grandma while she cuts her chicken at a slow, dignified pace. He says to me in English, "She reminds me of my mother."

INITIALLY, my El Salvador travel log ended here. In hindsight, I wish it had been possible to pause the events of history at this moment as I have attempted to distill it above in words. Instead, life lurched forward. In the early hours of May 16, 1999, Mario Sigfredo "Ringo" Rivera, the director of Homies Unidos, was shot three times in the chest by unknown assailants. He died outside Hospital Zacamil in San Salvador, where health workers allegedly refused to admit him for treatment. The local media highlighted his tattoos as justification for the assault.

Ringo was an admired leader and a rising star in mobilizing and uniting everyone from gangsters to diplomats. The tattoos across his torso told part of the story. Ringo was proud to be a homeboy; he was also a master at conflict resolution. Along with several fellow homies, Ringo had just received a grant to study human relations at a local university. He was just beginning to believe he could beat the odds and increase his life expectancy.

Like many deaths before it, the loss of

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Ringo had a ripple effect. Homies Unidos members struggled to resist the lure of alcohol, drugs, and violence. Some succumbed, some are recovering, a few ended up in prison. Most homies, including the current leaders, Weasel and Pansa Loca, have continued their projects and maintained their resolve.

The furies of nature and humanity may never leave El Salvador completely at peace. But through the efforts of Homies Unidos, a growing number of disenfranchised youth are grappling with renewed hope. Meanwhile in the United States, political discourse has shifted from cold war terminology to the notion of a global marketplace. But back when domino theory was the vanguard, the United States forwarded over a billion dollars to the tiny nation of El Salvador to help stop a peasant uprising. Whether or not it was our leaders' intention, U.S.-trained death squads killed civilians by the thousands, and then the U.S. government quietly opened its doors to a flood of refugees. When the war ended, the spirit of "zero tolerance" for crime and the criminalization of immigrants began to take hold in California. Federal immigration policy promoted immediate deportation of inner-city refugees who had acquired, arguably, the best fluency in survival warfare. In this new age of the global market, all the countries of Central America are officially at peace. But upon close examination, it is no longer possible for the United States to absolve itself of guilt for the culture of violence it exports. Like Coca-Cola and Michael Jordan, our particular brand of violence has seeped into the fabric of El Salvador. ●

GABRIELLE BANKS is a writer based in San Francisco, California.

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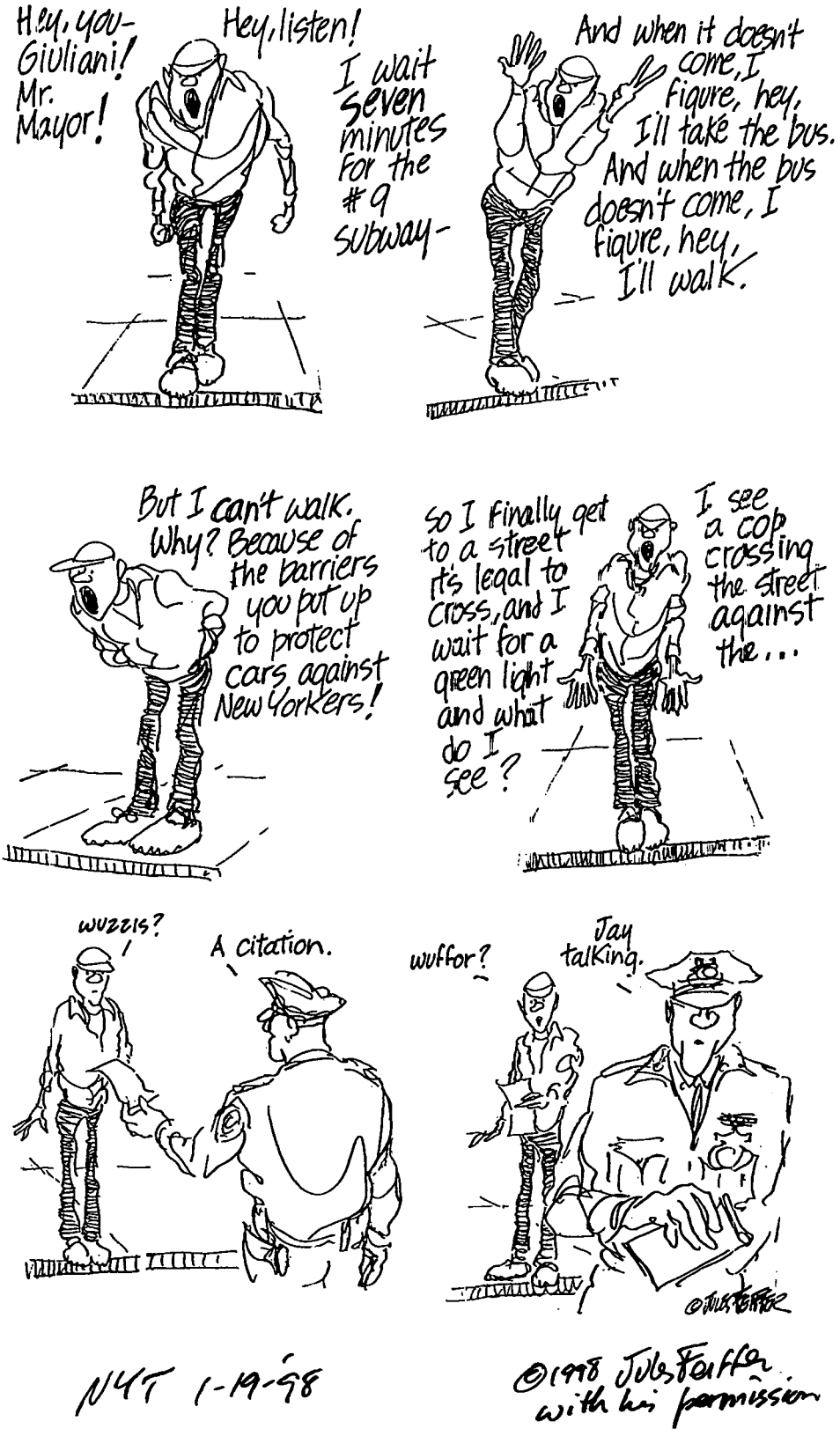
Hey, you- Giuliani! Mr. Mayor!
Hey, listen! I wait seven minutes for the #9 subway-
And when it doesn't come, I figure, hey, I'll take the bus. And when the bus doesn't come, I figure, hey, I'll walk.
But I can't walk. Why? Because of the barriers you put up to protect cars against New Yorkers!
So I finally get to a street it's legal to cross, and I wait for a green light and what do I see?
I see a cop crossing the street against the...
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Blue Jay Way

Where Will Critical Culture Come From?

Marshall Berman

Considering the mass murder and Nazi-style brutality that engulf so much of the world in the 1990s, it takes *chutzpah* for an American to say that our collective life contains any trouble at all. Our economy is thriving. It wasn't so long ago that there was nothing out there for kids coming out of school and college; today, kids are getting jobs. After years of rising homicide rates, people are killing each other less. People are still getting AIDS, but more of them are staying alive. American society is more open and inclusive than ever; it's not just what you see on the Madison Square Garden station or MTV—though that itself is something—it's all the interracial families and their marvelously colored children out shopping any Saturday afternoon at your local mall. So we should lighten up and enjoy the good news, right?

We at *Dissent* crave joy as ardently as anybody. But it's not easy for us to lighten up. Most of us are in or near middle age, and we worry about what will be there for our children and their children. Here's something that troubles our minds: There seems to be no *critical culture* in America today. A critical culture is one that struggles actively over how human beings should live and what our life means. Most of us can remember living in the critical culture of the sixties—a few of us can even remember the critical culture of the thirties—and we can feel the difference. When a critical culture breaks down or wears out or fades away, sources of joy dry up. What makes this happen? Why has it happened now? Is the loss permanent? Or are there traces, fragments, intimations of a new critical culture just around the corner? Where might it come from? How can it come together? Is there anything people like us can do to help it come?

One symptom of the lack of a critical culture today is our fetishism of "order." Giuliani-type politicians have convinced many people, including those who control the mass media, not only that they personally have made the homicide rate go down, but that they have done something even more profound: "restored order." New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani's idea of order seems to require freeing the streets not only from beggars and homeless people, but also from newsstands, food vendors, and wandering artists. His 1997 re-election campaign featured born-again testimonies from people said to be lifelong Democrats and liberals who had come to love him, because, like Moses parting the waters, "The mayor has stopped the violence." During the campaign, he proclaimed that, now that he had ended the violence, the police were going to start arresting people for jaywalking. At that point, the great Jules Feiffer published a cartoon (on the *New York Times* op-ed page) depicting a man making nasty remarks about the mayor's priorities and his sense of civic life. In the last panel, a police officer arrests him. For what? he asks. *For jaytalking*. Feiffer's image gets it just right, not just about the mayor, but about the culture of the nineties, and its amazing lack of jaytalking. The most endearing quality of the sixties was the way it taught us to jaytalk: to talk back; to talk against the lights; to talk outside the designated lines; to talk like our great American blue jays (there they are in Audubon's *Birds of America*, Number 282), small birds who emit loud and raucous cries that no one can ignore.

How does a culture of jaytalking come into being? It requires three things: (1) powerful and provocative ideas; (2) smart and imaginative people working in various sectors of life, often wholly unaware of each other's existence; and (3) "experimental neighborhoods," places

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where people and ideas can bump into each other, and where young people, with little experience but boundless energy, along with middle-aged people longing to escape from "uptown" or "the boroughs" or "suburbia," can find or imagine new ways to put the ideas together, and to act out their new syntheses.

The critical culture of the sixties came from very diverse sources. There were our universities, enlarged and intellectually enriched in the cold war boom. C. Wright Mills, Irving Howe, Herbert Marcuse, Noam Chomsky, David Riesman, Norman O. Brown, were all "tenured radicals" who developed their dangerous ideas within the classiest academic crosswalks. (Many of the creators of Students for a Democratic Society were their students.) Mike Harrington and Jane Jacobs worked as journalists and editors. Grace Paley taught, did secretarial work, brought up kids, and organized demos (at first quite small) as she wrote. William H. Whyte, Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, Susan Sontag, Walt Kelly, Dr. Seuss, all got rich from their books, and used their money to say things that would have got them in trouble (or gone unheard) if they were poor. Paul Goodman, like many great artists of the "New York School" generation, was supported by his wife; Dwight Macdonald, one of very few radicals from the *echt* ruling class, by his trust fund. Harold Rosenberg taught us to see through the mass media, to which he made one spectacular contribution: he was the man who created Smokey the Bear. The 1950s theatre produced *Death of a Salesman*, one of the permanently great radical plays, but also the avant-garde experiments of the Living Theatre, and Joseph Papp's Public Theatre, which synthesized vanguard dramaturgy with popular front marketing.

What about experimental neighborhoods? The 1950s offered plenty of these. As an ironic result of the flight of capital from American cities after World War II, every city gained grungy low-rent neighborhoods that could incubate bookstores and art studios and modern dance groups, experimental theatres, venues for jazz and folk music and performance, and the sort of shabby clubs and coffee houses and music stores and cabarets that nourished Lenny Bruce and Nichols and May and Woody Allen and Bob Dylan. New York's Village (first West, then East) is what I knew, but there were neighborhoods like this all over America. Late in the 1950s, they started to fill up with kids from all over metropolitan areas who could read the little magazines and the Grove Press paperbacks in the bookstores, hang out in streets and play their guitars in parks, hear sounds of music that carried from clubs they couldn't afford to go to, find intense people like themselves to walk and talk with through the night, and maybe to grope and love. These people transformed old and often sleepy streets into vibrant public spaces that never seemed to sleep at all.

New kinds of public spaces were embodied in two important new mass media: alternate weekly newspapers and listener-supported radio. Once more, it happened all over. New York's version features the *Village Voice* and WBAI. Both rallied superb arrays of jaytalkers (including Feiffer), and formed intense bonds with their audiences. America turned out to be full of people who were ready to listen to every minute and read every line in media that they felt were *their own*. These media taught their readers and listeners not only how to grow up, but how to act like citizens, to go into the streets and make trouble. The earliest struggles were to protect their own neighborhoods (in New York, Washington Square). But as the sixties unfolded, the new media made spiritual leaps, expanded their horizons, and developed into genuine moral educators. They taught their readers and listeners to think of black people, poor people, Vietnamese people, and victimized people everywhere as part of their neighborhoods.

WHERE WILL our culture find resources like these again? Maybe it won't, and crews of Bounderbys and Panglosses and mixed megapirates will rule the world forever. Or maybe only violent economic collapse will shake Americans out of their narcolepsy. This would put the left in the creepy position (where it has been before) of longing for horrible catastrophe. On the other hand, it may be, as it was forty years ago, that the country's very prosperity will give us slack, that it will create imaginative space where people can begin to think about a better life than this.

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What forms will critical thought take? Some people think there are no critical ideas left. My own feeling is that there is a superabundance of critical ideas in the air, if we can learn to inhale. Marxian and Freudian thought are both immensely provocative, capable of endlessly new syntheses, spin-offs, and hybridizations. No one has the authority to say definitively what these ideas mean. Not even the founders could close the floodgates they had opened. (They tried, in vain.) Maybe tomorrow's incarnations will be deepened by feminism, or by environmentalism, or biology, or cybernetics, or by any number of things that blacks and other "people of color" will have to say, or by other forms of thought I know nothing of. Regardless, we should recognize that, with Marx and Freud, we are all living on top of radical gold mines.

I confess (and it isn't hard to detect), I am guilty of nostalgia for the sixties, days of my youth. But I can see at least two big ways in which the horizon for radicalism is clearer today. Many leftists of my generation disdained the USSR, but still had a deep (sometimes desperate) need to identify with *some* idealized Other as a focus for their longings. Since 1989, the need for an ideal Other has abated, or at least radically slackened. It's a great leap forward that people today can criticize and denounce life in the West without having to genuflect toward a mythical East.

The other big problem about sixties radicalism was its lack of connection to a labor movement. The New Left is usually blamed for this. But in fact, the AFL-CIO of those days, dominated by George Meany and his crew, was not only aggressive in its chauvinist patriotism, but strident in its particularism and anti-intellectuality. Obsessed with smashing the commies, it was as rigid and dictatorial as any Communist Party. It fired its old, politically incorrect organizers, and made no moves to hire new ones: it was totally uninterested in organizing the unorganized. The weakness of today's labor movement follows directly from the stupidity of yesterday's strong one. But John Sweeney's AFL-CIO has looked beyond its own *apparat*, opened up its horizons, and started to imagine how big and powerful the working class might be. The unions have opened up an Organizing Institute, and a new generation of brilliant organizers has come up. Labor has started winning big strikes, not only in New York and Los Angeles, where you might expect it, but in Las Vegas and North Carolina. The labor movement's Union Summers have not only trained several thousand young adults in organizing skills—many are working as organizers now, many more are fellow-travelers—but generated a vision, a sense of mission, a human solidarity, as the civil rights movement did in its Freedom Summer days. We should listen for jaytalk here.

One big problem for any critical culture to come is, how will its concerns and its ideas be transmitted and shared? There is no way to reach multitudes of people except through media of mass communication. Many people think our mass media inevitably turn all ideas into banal slogans. My own feeling is that, although most of the contents of our mass media are banal (like most of the contents of our most esoteric refereed journals), the biggest problem may be the exact opposite: too many ideas, coming through too many channels. New media played crucial roles creating and developing the critical culture of the sixties. In the nineties, along with books, newspapers, magazines, movies, theater, recorded music, broadcasting, and the new media of yesterday, there are so many *new* "new media," from the many forms of cable television, desktop publishing, video, 'zines, to e-mail and all the metamorphoses of the Net, that it is harder than ever not to be flooded out. As communications technologies metastasize, it will be even harder not to be flooded out tomorrow.

SOME PEOPLE aren't worried about this because they don't think our new media have much to say. An epigram of the early computer culture was "Garbage in, garbage out." A decade ago, Bruce Springsteen had a hit, "57 Channels And Nothing On." But anyone today who tries to listen and look around is bound to find that there's more "on" in American popular culture than most of us have thought. In the summer, when I'm freer to sample, my last week's collection included *Daria*, on cable television, an animated intellectual nonconformist teenage girl's so-called life—Salinger's

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Franny, *geworfen* into Orange County; *Psychoanalysis, What Is It?* and *Prince of Thieves*; albums by the rapper and producer Prince Paul; the 'zine *Processed World*, a cyberpunk incarnation of *Dissent*. All this material shows impressive brains and sensitivity and critical awareness. If only there were ways for these people and people like them—including people like us—to connect and interact!

How can the people and the ideas come together? How can they crystallize into something? In the cyberworld, ideas are channeled into "chat rooms," a multitude of demographically small, segmented spaces, and focused on limited but intense "niche" audiences. Most of their chats seem to be pretty dull, as most chats are; still it could be that some small rooms have nourished ideas and perspectives that might make big differences. If only we knew how to break open those rooms, we could build Greenwich Villages in cyberspace. In these new experimental neighborhoods, the critical culture of tomorrow could be born.

Or maybe not. Maybe it all will happen on paper in "old" media, or in "old" Greenwich Villages, in old streets and restaurants and cafes and parks, through old-fashioned face-to-face encounters, among people who have lived through everything new that the eighties and nineties offered, and who feel a need for more: for insight beyond any Web site, for a promised land beyond the Net, where blue jays sing. ●

MARSHALL BERMAN's latest book is *Adventures in Marxism.*

RESPONSES

Margot Adler

I LOVE Marshall Berman's notion of jaytalking. It reminds me of Ms. Frizzle, in the *Magic School Bus* series, telling her kids, "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy." It's exactly the opposite of the push in today's culture, to "get it right, pour on the homework, choose your career carefully, don't rock the boat." The idea of jaytalking also reminds me of a wonderful notion that was put forth many years ago—only partly as a joke—by the science fiction writer Robert Anton Wilson. Wilson and several friends started the Erisian Movement, named after the Goddess of Chaos, Eris or Discordia. Eris was the goddess who threw out the golden apple that started the Trojan War. In writing about the idea of Eris, Wilson noted that people in our culture tend to split the world into order versus disorder, but in fact, if you understand creativity there are always at least four possibilities, not two: creative order, destructive order, creative disorder, destructive disorder. By emphasizing the creative instead of emphasizing order it is possible to help bring about a culture that understands that creative disorder is often necessary for art, culture and life. The obsession with order at the expense of creativity has created a situation in politics, in our schools, in the workplace, and everywhere else, where people are afraid to honor the juices that ferment in creative chaos, to take chances themselves or to let their kids get messy.

Berman mentions the debt all radicals have to Marx and Freud. Marx in particular gave many of us a framework for our ideas—an order that was at times creative and at times destructive. But given the flaws of our present society and the lack of a critical culture, it seems fitting to mention that both Marx and Freud understood that nothing is as it seems. The seemingly free individual in our market culture is in no way as free as he or she thinks—every so-called free idea is tinged by one's history, class, race, gender, family history, unconscious drives, and so forth. It's hard to conceive of a critical culture without some method of imparting the knowledge to future generations that there are always veils to pull

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aside, and hidden understandings that are not apparent at first glance.

Early in 1999, I spent quite a bit of time with Y2K organizers in Boulder, Colorado. Many of them were grassroots activists who had spent many years doing tenant organizing or health care work. As I listened to these people, I remembered how many years I spent yearning secretly for some kind of apocalyptic moment: If only the revolution would come, then I would know what to do with my life, and my decisions would be as clear and pure as fire, not the messy day-to-day reality I was actually encountering during the late sixties and early seventies.

As I watched these Y2K organizers using this moment in time to create community meetings and neighborhood associations; as I watched them make very good and rational arguments—that whether Y2K involves any breakdown or not, this is a moment when neighborhoods and communities can get together and prepare (always a good thing), and in addition they can get to know their neighbors and create community—I noted that underneath there was a yearning. I felt it in myself as well. The seed of that yearning went something like this: if there is a breakdown of society, perhaps people will be forced to understand the importance of community, and perhaps this will create a moment where people will see that "things," "stuff," technology, should not be the center of a truly human life.

But down deep I think that while there may be some breakdowns, mostly our society will keep on going, and we will have to find a way to create a critical and loving human culture even if nothing big changes, and even if the stock market keeps on going up and up and up.

The other day I was at a memorial service. About twenty people sat around and remembered a woman who had been my mother's best friend. We all spoke of this circle of friends—our mothers and fathers—that had come of age in the Great Depression and most had been ardent radicals. We tried to think about how our lives—those of us in our fifties—were different from theirs—only a few of them still alive now, in their eighties and nineties. They not only worked at living their ideals, they worked at friendship. They were constantly on the phone talking to each other. When my mother died, one of her friends wrote, "She phoned every night, tucking us into our beds." These friends were never too busy. They never said, "Let's do lunch," and disappeared. Most of our lives are so truncated and busy that we might do well to consider that creating a critical culture also means creating a human culture, and that takes daily human effort that few of us, so far, have been willing to make. ●

MARGOT ADLER is a correspondent for National Public Radio and author of *Heretic's Heart: A Journey through Spirit and Revolution.*

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Andrew Delbanco

I SUSPECT WE all share Marshall Berman's craving for a "critical culture . . . that struggles actively over how human beings should live and what our life means." But when he laments "the amazing lack of jaytalking" in contemporary America, I demur. It seems to me that jaytalking has become as widespread and safe as the misdemeanor from which he derives the term—crossing the street against the light—an act that almost never gets one in trouble (even in the reign of Rudy) unless one is very unlucky in traffic. In the past, jaytalkers paid for their candor with public shame and broken careers. (Berman mentions Lenny Bruce.) But who are their heirs today? Posturing professors who hold forth in a "transgressive" academic subculture that has almost no salutary impact on society at large, and professional foulmouths like Howard Stern and Al Goldstein, who sometimes jaytalk with charm, but mostly do it for money, and thereby become heroes of metropolitan life. In fact, there has never been a hotter market for jaytalk than there is today—a victory, to be sure, for tolerance and free speech, but one with insidious consequences for the real critical culture that we all want to revive. The fact is that jaytalk today is everywhere—and, therefore, nowhere. It has been co-opted and commodified, as Lionel Trilling (a jaytalker himself, despite his donnish decorum) foresaw nearly forty years ago, when he noticed the beginnings of the "acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive."

Berman wants to believe that we are living through a prelude to some sort of revival of the real thing—and who can blame him? But I wonder if he isn't swayed into expectancy by a certain uncritical nostalgia for the 1960s, when, he says, the world was full of "intense people" ready and able to "walk and talk through the night, and maybe to grope and love." History has judged that they—we—did not do a very good job of transmuting this narcissistic intensity into durable forms of productive social action. As guardians of the critical culture, we failed.

In its failure to renew itself in the 1990s, the so-called counterculture of the sixties has proven to be historically distinctive. Until now, critical culture in the United States has tended to follow something like a thirty-year rhythm of ebb and flow. Perhaps this is because of the comparable lag between the age when one is most likely to be fruitfully insolent (one's teens and twenties) and the coming-of-age of one's children. A case could be made (Morris Dickstein did so implicitly in his book on the sixties, *Gates of Eden*) that our earliest counterculture was the wave of religious revivals that periodically swept the American colonies—outbursts of resistance to prevailing dogma and established churches, often led by young ministers who belonged to the lineage of oppositional intellectuals whom Michael Walzer described in his book on English Puritanism, *The Revolution of the Saints*. (Historians have long sensed a continuity—though they still argue over just what it was—from the Great Awakening of the 1740s, to the American Revolution of the 1770s, to the Jeffersonian "revolution" of 1800.)

TO MOST OF US today, these "jaytalkers" seem remote and alien. We are more likely to feel kinship with the abolitionists, proto-feminists, transcendentalists, and "free-love" experimentalists who rattled America in the 1830s. Thirty years later, the Civil War (itself a crusade with revivalist elements) was fought by those renegades' children. After the victory of big-business Republicanism in the wake of that war, there came the progressive and populist revolts of the 1890s. Then, after the customary lag, there arose the two-stage critical culture of the 1920s and 1930s (a first phase of exile, irony, and artistic and sexual experimentation, followed by a second phase of radical and reform politics). Finally, our own so-called counterculture of the 1960s arrived—and turned out, as Berman notes, to be the running out of the tide.

One conspicuous reason that the next wave of critical culture has been indefinitely postponed is that while there may be a rising level of chronic anxiety in contemporary America,

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there appears to be no acute feeling of urgency of the sort our parents experienced in the panic of the Great Depression or from some sudden foreign menace, or of the personal sort we felt from the military draft during the Vietnam War years. The collective concerns of most prosperous Americans today are abstract and deferrable: environmental degradation, future attrition of Social Security benefits, the occasional act of terrorism close to home. As the economist Robert Frank has pointed out, the prospect of costly illness—even for many of the millions without health insurance—seems a theoretical threat.

ANOTHER REASON we are still waiting for the tide to come back in is that we have not been adequate exemplars to our children. Through our youthful chanting and heckling, we nevertheless listened (or half-listened) to voices from our parents' youth—to witnesses who spoke about the Great Depression, the wars against fascism, and the long-deferred struggle for civil rights. Our troubadours—the Weavers, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie—connected us, at least tentatively, to what we regarded as an interrupted tradition we wanted to embrace and revive. Some of us even found exemplary virtue in figures (Churchill, Roosevelt) who commanded state power when our parents were young or who challenged power from within the political system (Norman Thomas, Henry Wallace). What comparable witnesses do we present to *our* children? Abbie Hoffman? Eldridge Cleaver? Do tragic liberals like Hubert Humphrey or Lyndon Johnson mean anything to anyone in America under fifty?

I realize there is more than a whiff of determinism in this highly schematic and reductive account of the career of critical culture in America. In some respects, it is (like Berman's essay) an exculpatory account. It lets us off the hook; it says that we children of the sixties need not take the blame for the terrible war that turned us into ironists and soured us on virtually all institutions. But we should not be so easy on ourselves. The institutions we created or inherited—political parties, publishing houses, universities, magazines, corporations—all participate in the profit-maximizing, celebrity-crazed, consumer-glutted society we decry. The fact is that we baby boomers have not sufficiently resisted the brute marketplace values that now overwhelm every aspect of American life. It is still up to us to hold ourselves to account by making visible the possibility of a society more inclined to justice and mercy than the imaginatively straitened culture in which we now live, and which many in our generation have willingly embraced. ●

ANDREW DELBANCO's most recent book is *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope.*

To Our Contributors

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't consider articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is editors@dissentmagazine.org.

(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

THE EDITORS

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John Patrick Diggins

MARSHALL BERMAN sees in the incoherence of a punk culture the same potential that Marx once thought he saw in the rising consciousness of a proletarian movement: the coming "negation" of the capitalist order. But neither the street youths of today nor the factory workers of yesterday, neither the guitar nor the hammer, have ever posed such a challenge.

The *Dissent* circle, as learned as it is dogged, persists with the illusions of democratic socialism, as though an egalitarian moral economy of community and mutuality can be willed into existence. In the past the American left could sustain such illusions because it looked elsewhere: Russia, China, Cuba, catastrophes all, but regimes that misled the left into believing that if only democracy displaces totalitarianism, socialism will rise to glory as surely as the sun rises out of the morning's dew. Today the left must face America, a free, liberal society of political rights and property protections. The sustained intensity with which the left has attacked liberalism only dramatizes the historical fact that socialism has never been able to be spawned from it.

The left's worthiest aim has always been not to realize the best but to oppose the worst. Berman says nothing about the achievements made in civil rights, feminism, the environment, and the equalization of higher education. Perhaps such causes defy the socialist scenario of collective solidarity and validate the viability of liberal institutions. The causes are neither transformative nor transgressive, but noble causes they remain.

Berman wonders what happened to the "critical culture" that animated the sixties. "Critical"? The heady promises of pot and sexual freedom, the assaults on authority and the "bourgeois" family, the fetish of "participatory democracy," and other misplaced wishes could scarcely withstand the scrutiny of self-criticism. Berman pines away for the older culture of innovative theatres, jazz and coffee houses, and shaggy youths coming to life on the streets. Marx once advised that we must draw our "poetry" from the future; Berman's nostalgia for the past sounds more and more like Willa Cather lamenting the loss of village life, not in New York but in Nebraska.

Berman is far more optimistic about the materials of intellectual history than may be warranted. We need to understand, he advises, that "with Marx and Freud, we are living on top of radical gold mines" and that Miller's *Death of the Salesman* remains "one of the permanently great radical plays." Marx saw socialism as the stage that supplants liberalism; today the sequence is reversed. Former communist countries aspire to liberalism, assuming they can return to a stage of history they have never experienced in its full flowering. Freud would, I believe, like to be told that we "are living on top" of his corpus, but would he not be a little amused to see the Freudian left trace neurosis and repression to an environment of scarcity when we are living in a society of abundance? Where is the wish for "polymorphous perversity" more fulfilled than in a Calvin Klein ad? As to *Death of a Salesman,* Willy Loman's plight can be read in many ways, not all of which are necessarily radical. A neoconservative might see him as a man without character, one who grew up in an environment that Berman offers as his ideal: in "places where people and ideas bump into each other, and where young people, with little experience but boundless energy, along with middle-aged people longing to escape from 'uptown' or 'the boroughs' or 'suburbia,' can find or imagine new ways to put the ideas together, and to act their new syntheses out." Loman's tragedy was to think he was nothing unless he interacted with others, unless he could make his ambitious energy socially acceptable by being well-liked, unless he could sell himself as well as his product. Berman wants people to "come together." So does capitalism and its consumer culture. Loman needed to know how to define himself apart from society and its snares. Loman needed Emerson.

It is no secret that the left without its illusions is like a fish out of water. One of the most desperate illusions is to look to labor for "a vision, a sense of mission, a human solidarity."

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Berman's hope that John Sweeney's leadership of the AFL-CIO will be a vast improvement over that of George Meaney can only be entertained if he is willing to accept inevitable failure. In American history no labor organization came close to succeeding when it followed the socialist mystique of organizing all workers in the spirit of class solidarity. As to culture, the American worker is more interested in a paycheck than in jaytalk. ●

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS is author of *Foundations of American History*, forthcoming, Yale University Press.

Todd Gitlin

INSTEAD OF critical culture, "struggl[ing] actively over how human beings should live," we have a pale culture of critics. Censorship is a permanent irritation but serious-minded people (who can also be joyful, why not?) need to face up to the fact that the grim-faced likes of New York's Mayor No, his mouth locked into a permanent sneer, is also, for critical critics, a feel-good source of embattlement, a convenient target for free-loving thinkers. If we have the luxury of living outside the Bible Belt, the censors are not the essential problem. Transgression is cheap. Criticism is all over the cable dial. The internet is loaded with sniggers. Derision, as Mark Crispin Miller pointed out years ago, is the normal stuff of sitcoms.

The "transgression" so tediously heralded in unreadable academic journals is not exceptional, not transgressive at all; it's normal. It's the necessary accoutrement of a sales culture that offers a zillion commodities to rattle the nerve endings. Everything from farts to camp to hip-hop is available on demand—who needs politics for that? The wonderful "Simpsons" are Rupert Murdoch's most remunerative export. One of the chief applause terms today is "edgy"—it's enough to make one want to turn to the *Baffler*, which bills itself as "the magazine that blunts the cutting edge." The libertarian side of the left, from Greenwich Village bohemians of the teens and twenties through the sixties, hasn't—or can't—come to grips with the prevailing cultural sponginess. As Berman writes, we have "too many ideas, coming through too many channels." I would say, rather, that more than ideas, there's a superflux of impulses, quivers, tropisms. This isn't the desert, it's the swamp. Here's the pathos of individualism in a prosperous society: If your objective is to kick open the doors of musty rooms, there's no failure like success. The consumer paradise on offer every day in a thousand forms—just put down your plastic and sign here—is as wide open as a trap door. Rebellion is written full-bore over the banality of most hip channels and independent films. A rebellion industry is the routine accompaniment of the sales onslaught.

Among those of a genuinely critical bent—those who care about equality and fraternity as well as liberty—ideas in the abstract about the Good are not what is lacking today. Far more important, what we lack are ideas about forms of action. It wasn't ideas about democracy, or civil rights, or poverty, as such, that made the sixties distinctive—the ideas had, for the most part, been kicking around for decades—but forms of action that were (a) promising, (b) exciting for a critical mass of activists, (c) galvanizing of a larger social spirit, and (d) ultimately effective, like the Freedom Ride, the nonviolent sit-in, the freedom ballot.

Finally, I disagree with my friend Marshall that "Marxian and Freudian thought are both immensely provocative." Marx and Freud helped crack open the nineteenth century. That was good work—though in the case of Marx, his blindness to the abominations of state power helped poison the twentieth century, a consequence to which "Whoops, sorry about that" won't do. But in any event, the old guys are dead. The gold mines are played out. Dead doesn't mean useless; there was a lot of gold, as well as dross, in them hills, and we can still take pleasure in the bracelets, or nose-rings, made from the precious metal, if that's your thing. But it doesn't take us so far anymore to be reminded that class matters, that means of production (and their friction against relations of production) are crucial, that capitalism is

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creative as well as destructive; or that unconscious processes are important, that there is a logic to illogic, that infantile sexuality happens, that families are little societies with their own barbarities.

The old-time religions, including those of Marx and Freud, are what people hang onto when they're lost. Sometimes it's better to admit you're lost. ●

TODD GITLIN 's most recent book is *Sacrifice*, a novel.

Russell Jacoby

WHO WANTS to criticize a commentator as well-meaning and warmhearted as Marshall Berman? He is a bard of urban life with an infectious enthusiasm for New York. For many years he has been singing of the joys of city streets and corners, where he often finds evidence of a cultural renewal and transformation. When Berman goes shopping and encounters an Asian woman with a black child eating a bagel, he excitedly announces a revolution is in progress. But even Berman is now a little down in the mouth, wondering what happened to the "critical culture" of the past. The throbbing city streets do not seem to be undermining capitalism.

We probably all share Berman's worry over the disappearance of a critical culture, but the way he formulates the issue reveals how lost he—and let me add, I and everyone else—has become. He writes we need three things to revitalize a subversive culture: (1) powerful and provocative ideas (2) smart and imaginative people and (3) vital neighborhoods. Unfortunately he has not gone very far. Take some clever people with good ideas and put them in very nice quarters. What could be bad? Nothing, but is this a theory or even a notion of cultural transformation? Berman sounds less like a jaytalker than a yenta or perhaps a developer with an idea for an urban coffeeklatch with buzz.

At best one might say that Berman is offering the Upper West Side/old Greenwich Village theory of cultural change. It hasn't worked in the last thirty years; ergo, it may work soon. Why? He doesn't tell us. Have the ideas gotten better? No. The people smarter? No. The streets livelier? No. He indicates one important advance from his beloved sixties, when an ossified labor movement spurned leftists. Now a revitalized labor movement welcomes radicals and intellectuals. According to Berman, "a new generation" of "brilliant" AFL-CIO organizers is now "winning big strikes." Putting aside the truth of this, Berman may not realize his observation can be turned against his argument. If I may be heretical in what is still a socialist magazine, why does Berman think that successful AFL-CIO organizers have anything to do with building a subversive culture? Berman may want to reread his Lenin. Perhaps a fossilized labor movement, paradoxically, was essential for sixties activism; it drove talented and energetic souls, who would have been swallowed up by the union bureaucracy, into other and more radical endeavors.

Berman has longings for a future critical culture, but, alas, not even an inkling of what he wants. He tells us radical ideas are everywhere; we just have to "learn to inhale." For instance, what? He pulls the old leftist trick, substituting group thought for thought. He doesn't know what ideas, but he knows the groups that will engender them: feminists, environmentalists, black people or other minorities. But what will these groups offer? Berman cannot say.

HIS SINGLE effort to get specific is admittedly limited; he checks out cable TV and surfs the net and is awed by the "impressive brains and sensitivity." There he goes again: smart and imaginative people doing smart and imaginative things. Cool. But what does this have to do with anything? "The biggest problem" out there in electronic land is "too many ideas." Like what? Give us one.

I will not pretend to have answers, but I do think that it is better to admit that the situation is dark than to affect a cheeriness that finds ferment everywhere. To put this differ-

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with the poor, in one solidaristic community. Few Americans would, I think, accept this disclaimer. We are willing to respect other societies even if they do not realize, or even aspire to realize, full justice as we understand it. But we do believe that there are certain minimum conditions that any state—whether its people conceive it as a solidaristic community or not—must meet for it to deserve moral respect. However such a minimal standard of decency might be formulated in detail (*cf.* Rawls), it seems clear that Brazil, given its massive and avoidable poverty, would fail to qualify.

But if the global economic order is at least as bad as Brazil's, must not the same judgment apply to it as well? This thought is suggested by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized," including the "right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care" (articles 28 and 25). As article 28 suggests, the incidence of severe poverty is importantly influenced by the existing social and international order. And such poverty may then entail not merely positive responsibilities for influential Brazilians and for us as potential helpers, but also negative responsibilities for influential Brazilians and for us as supporters of an economic order that reproduces massive starvation and poverty. Instead of merely failing to help the poor, we may be involved in harming them through the imposition of a global economic order under which inequality increases so rapidly that the gains from economic progress are huge at the top and minuscule or nonexistent at the bottom of the global hierarchy (*cf.* Milanovic).

It is hardly surprising that the global order reflects the interests of wealthy and powerful states. Dependent on our votes and taxes, our government, with its allies, works very hard to shape the rules for our benefit, as we can see from its response to the World Food Summit, from its successful renegotiation of the Law of the Seas Treaty, and from countless other examples. To be sure, the global poor have their own governments. But almost all of them are too weak to exert any real influence on the organization of the global economy. More important, such governments have little incentive to attend to the needs of their poor citizens, as their continuation in power depends on the local elite and on foreign governments and corporations. It is not surprising, then, that developing countries with rich natural resource endowments are especially likely to experience civil wars and undemocratic rule and hence achieve slower (if any) economic growth (Lam). Their rulers can sell the country's resources, buy arms and soldiers to maintain their rule, and amass personal fortunes. They like the global economic order just the way it is. And affluent states, too, have no interest in changing the rules so that ownership rights in natural resources cannot be acquired from tyrannical governments. Such a change would reduce the supply and hence increase the price of the resources we import.

People can kill one another with bombs and machetes. But economic arrangements are often quite as effective. Millions were killed in the Irish potato famine, in Stalin's forced collectivization, in Mao's Great Leap Forward, in contemporary North Korea, as well as in many other human-made disasters. The ongoing catastrophe of world hunger is of the same kind. But it is also different: by being less confined in space and time, even more devastating, and less recognized. It claims a third of all human deaths. But these deaths happen far away, to people we never encounter. They happen in social contexts whose dependence on the existing global order we do not understand. And they happen in areas where we assume people have always been desperately poor. It seems unlikely, then, that the citizens and governments of the developed countries will be struck by the problem enough to recognize their responsibility. And so the deaths, with occasional summits, can be expected to continue for a long time to come.

IT IS OFTEN said that moral reflections on world hunger are worthless, because no one denies that hunger is bad and should not exist. We should instead think about the practical question: how hunger might best be erased. I certainly agree that we should think about this practical question and will speak to

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it shortly. But I strongly disagree with the first point. The U.S. government has gone far out of its way to deny that the World Food Summit pledge, which calls hunger "intolerable" and "unacceptable," gives rise to any international obligations. This great moral error, shared by most governments and citizens of the developed countries, is the principal obstacle to eradicating world hunger. Without a sense of moral responsibility for the global economic order we are imposing, there will not be the political will to reform this order, nor sufficient readiness by governments and individuals to mitigate its worst effects.

The moral responsibility I assert presupposes that the governments and citizens of the developed countries *can* reduce world hunger through measures of reform and mitigation. Some professional economists invite skepticism about this assumption in three ways: by showing that some methods (for example, large-scale development aid) have not worked well; by arguing that the effects of individual variables in a highly complex system cannot be reliably measured (the clear benefits of Oxfam projects or Grameen Bank microlending to specific individuals may well be offset by their unknowable indirect effects); and by spirited disagreements about what is to be done (causing laypersons to shrug: "If even economists differ so sharply, then perhaps we had better do nothing").

But this skepticism is rejected even by the governments of the affluent states. They have made the World Food Summit pledge and, in the case of the United States, argued in great detail that they can halve hunger by 2015 even more cheaply than the FAO has estimated. Not even these governments—certainly not above characterizing things they don't want to do as things they cannot do—have endorsed the view that reducing world hunger is beyond our capacities. To be sure, they recognize no moral responsibility to reduce world hunger immediately and rapidly. But even they are constrained to agree that, if such a responsibility existed, it is not defeated by any evident incapacity to fulfill it.

It is true that much so-called aid has been ineffective in eradicating poverty. But this is hardly surprising, given that most of it has been bilateral development aid focused on buying political support from foreign governments and domestic exporters. Money can be more effectively spent, especially on local goods and services: enabling poor people to buy more and better foodstuffs and shelter, financing more and better schools and health services, and improving the local infrastructure (safe water, sanitation, electricity, road, rail links). Many governments of developing countries would welcome such funds and would contribute to making them effective, especially if their contribution were rewarded with continued funding. Yes, there are other poor countries whose rulers are more interested in keeping their poorer compatriots destitute, uneducated, impotent, dependent, and hence exploitable. In such cases, the least we should do is withdraw support from these rulers: by not letting them sell their country's resources to our firms, by not letting them borrow from our banks in their country's name, and by not letting them buy from our firms the arms they need to stay in power. Doing that would make it harder for them to maintain their power without popular support and, most important, would greatly reduce the rewards of, and hence incentives toward, the undemocratic acquisition and unresponsive exercise of political power.

A third response to the economists' smokescreen of skepticism goes back to Immanuel Kant, who argued that a morally mandated project may not be abandoned merely because, for all we currently know, it *may* be unachievable, but only if it is "demonstrably impossible" (Kant 89, 173-4). When the income of the top tenth of humankind is one hundred times the income of the bottom quarter, when a third of all human deaths are due to poverty, and when aggregate global income is continuously rising, it would be ludicrous to claim that reducing poverty is demonstrably impossible. We do not perhaps know the best way to proceed, but we are not exactly clueless either and would learn much more in the course of making a serious and concerted effort. Clearly, our critical deficiency is not expertise but a sense of moral responsibility and, based thereon, the political will to fund basic development and push reforms in the global economic order. ●

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Ellen Willis

WHEN MARSHALL BERMAN laments the decline of critical culture in America, he omits the implied and crucial qualifier: *democratic*. For there is no shortage of critical culture on the right, where free-market radicals inveigh against the remnants of state power and cultural conservatives attack every aspect of post-sixties culture from no-fault divorce to sexually permissive television shows. The left, in contrast, has run in panic from the cultural radical legacy of the sixties and is desperate to identify itself with "the majority of working families," or whatever is currently code for "normal people."

The prerequisite for a critical culture is a sense of possibility. Without some inkling that things might be different—and better—criticism doesn't lead to struggle, but rather to pessimism and despair, or at best to gestures of individual rebellion against nature or fate. Convinced that what exists is all there is, most people will prefer to make the best of it. If their experience doesn't quite jibe with the cultural common sense, they figure it must be their own fault: ironically, even Marshall Berman worries, if only rhetorically, about being a malcontent.

The left, at this moment, has lost that indispensable ability to connect what is with what could be. It is paralyzed by the culture of celebration and its constant assertion that we have reached the end of history: that capitalism is the final solution to the class problem—imperfect, perhaps, as the weather is imperfect, but inevitable and on the whole benign; that liberal democracy as we know it is the best political system to which human beings can aspire; that visions of cultural transformation are at best idle fantasy, at worst blueprints for tyranny. The proximate cause of this paralysis is the failure of the Russian Revolution—not just the fall of the Soviet Union, in effect the demolition of a building long since emptied and crumbling, but the devastating conversion of emancipatory theory into totalitarian practice, in one country after another—coupled with the absorption of social democracy into liberalism. With the collapse of the Marxist paradigm, the left has no ready answers to capitalist triumphalism. Yet without the belief that it is possible to imagine an alternative social and economic structure, there can be no democratic critical culture. For our present culture and our capitalist political economy are, while not without their disjunctions, fundamentally intertwined.

BERMAN APPEARS to deny that connection when he asserts his cultural disappointment while conceding, "Our economy is thriving." This is the triumphalist claim, but is it true? From a democratic perspective the test of a thriving economy is not simply the rate of growth or the number of available jobs, but the prospect of freedom from the tyranny of scarcity. The prosperity of the fifties and sixties offered that freedom to an unparalleled extent. The majority of Americans enjoyed middle-class incomes (with one wage-earner able to support an entire household), job security, social benefits, viable public institutions like schools and libraries. Furthermore, time and money were fungible: people could trade off a certain degree of affluence for less work and more freedom, making possible mass bohemianism, social experiment, leisure to reflect on one's quality of life. None of this holds today. America's "prosperity" applies to a shrinking minority; public goods deteriorate or disappear; temporary jobs without security or benefits are becoming the norm; two full-time incomes are needed to support children decently; and even the upper middle class cannot trade money for time but is required to work as many hours to maintain its class position as the rest of the population works merely to survive. Corporations, for their part, impose authoritarian discipline and inhumane working conditions on employees of all classes.

There can be no democratic critical culture that does not confront the corporation—its authoritarian hierarchy, its robotizing cult of efficiency, its glorification of endless, compulsive work, its contempt for workers' rights, its colonization of every activity from publishing to education and health care. In other

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words, we need a new labor movement, one that contests not only the distribution of profits but the prerogatives of corporate management and the organization of work. It could develop within the infrastructure of existing unions, or outside it, or both. Where is the pressure for such a movement to come from? If historical experience is any guide, it won't start with poor and working-class people who are overwhelmed with struggling to make ends meet. The recent moves toward unionizing of doctors, psychologists, and graduate students suggest one source of restlessness with the present regime—the increasingly proletarianized professionals whose sense of entitlement to autonomy and respect is being violated by corporatization. Other potential rebels are writers, artists, and even scientists at odds with the relentless corporate devaluation of all work that doesn't immediately inflate the bottom line. In the sixties critical culture inspired social movements; this time, I believe, it will have to be the other way around. ●

ELLEN WILLIS's latest book is *Don't Think, Smile: Notes on a Decade of Denial.*

Marshall Berman Replies

ISN'T IT GREAT to hear all the birds still out there? Radicals of a certain age, we may have lost a couple of steps, but it's nice to see we can still bring the noise. Nice, too, to hear somebody under thirty lifting her voice to join in. I wish I could have struck a chord that would have harmonized all the voices in our tree, but hey, at least I've made a mix!

Jack Diggins makes it clear he is no leftist, he's just passing through. (On his way to where?) He wants leftists to notice "the achievements made in civil rights, feminism, the environment, and the equalization of higher education." He doesn't seem to notice how many leftists have spent their whole lives fighting for these values. (Some have even died for them.) He wants to know, Why do we keep attacking a more-or-less liberal society instead of curling up with it? Why can't we just let it be? These are good questions. The answer, my friend, is one of the prime forces in modern life: the drive to surpass ourselves, to overcome—"We shall overcome." Diggins digs it when it comes from Wall Street or Silicon Valley. Why shouldn't it also spring from the not-so-classy sites where American radicals move and live?

I like to think I favor discontent, but Russell Jacoby is over the top—you could even say he defines the top. When he denounces blue jays, at first you think it's a joke, but you may be wrong. Is he auditioning for "A Hunger Artist" ("I just never found anything I liked"), or for *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*? Now, I don't expect Jacoby to like me, but why does he dislike the American labor movement? Not for being "fossilized" yesterday, but for trying to come back to life today. He says "reread Lenin" and see why political thinking is beyond workers' capacity. Now it is true Lenin said that, in *What Is To Be Done?* But in 1905 and 1917, when Russian workers went out in the streets, occupied factories and oil fields, and created *soviets,* Lenin and his party had the brains to rush and catch up with them. Jacoby says "more radical endeavors" can thrive without a labor movement, but he never says what these are. I hope he'll write and let us know.

Andrew Delbanco is also morose. But he at least has a clear excuse. He teaches college English, surrounded by David Lodge characters who promote themselves as ultra-radicals, but couldn't care less about any life outside the academic world. (Or even about life *in* that world, which grows ever more dependent on a migratory, proletarian labor force of "assistants" who work without health benefits or job security.) He has written a brilliant jeremiad against this scene in the November 4, 1999 *New York Review of Books*. The mission statement in that piece is a lot like what I mean by "critical culture." Delbanco in *Dissent* has much more of a Day-of-Atonement flavor: "we baby-boomers have not sufficiently resisted...we have not been adequate exemplars to our children," and it is because of us and our inadequacy that "brute marketplace values...now overwhelm every aspect of American life." I think this gives "us" credit (and blame) for more agency than

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we have. Brute market values are riding so high today because the brutal market has so much *real power*. I don't share, or even understand, Delbanco's sense of guilt. But he's right about what intellectuals should do: not just rage against the machine, but explain how it works.

My friend Todd Gitlin has been doing this for more than thirty years. He is nastily derisive about Marx, and my attachment to Marx, today: "the old guys are dead...the gold mines are played out...the old-time religions, including Marx and Freud, are what people hang onto when they're lost." But Marx has nourished his own thought at many points. In Todd's youth, when he was part of the Students for a Democratic Society inner circle in its golden age, that dream team produced a powerful vision of what was then called "the new working class": workers who were educated and professional, who worked with their brains, often in creative ways, and who sometimes made money, yet who were deeply alienated from their own activity, and subjected to market values over which they had no control. It was clear that this vision of complexity and contradiction was built on Marx, and on neo-Marxists like C. Wright Mills. (The early SDS made use of Marx with unpretentious fluency; it was no big deal.) Thirty years later, white-collar work and workers are at the center of our economy and society. Over the years, Todd has incorporated the SDS white-collar vision into his fine studies of mass media. Is he now saying that vision is out of date? When did its obsolescence occur? It seems to me the vision is more relevant than ever, and especially relevant for Todd himself. For years, he has been arguing that modern "identity politics" turns people hopelessly against each other, and throws us all into a melancholy "twilight of common dreams." But if he wants common dreams, shouldn't he explore one big thing nearly all of us have in common, our membership in the working class? And if he does, is he really sure it wouldn't help to have Marx at his side?

Ellen Willis, too, has spent half a life taking the machine apart. With verve and fresh energy as well as analytical power, she zeroes in on the downsized white-collar workers of the nineties, who are at once more educated and more degraded than their ancestors, the subjects of *White Collar* and *The Organization Man*. Today's "proletarianized professionals" need to find new ways to "confront the corporation," to fight for a "sense of entitlement to autonomy and respect." In fact, members of every generation have to find new ways of seeing, so they not only can see that they are subject to the market's power, but also that they have the resources to fight the power. (Whoever expected doctors to form a union? But then, it wasn't so long ago that people were amazed to see teachers do it.) However, Ellen impedes herself because she can't see how many people, in spite of everything, are doing well. The American economy has created more breathing space for more people than most of us expected it could. That space could close tomorrow, but it's open today. If we can't see it, we won't be able to help people breathe deeper or lay claim to more and better air.

I've never met Margot Adler, but for years I've been enthralled with her radio voice. She has spent most of her life closer to the edge of our critical culture than I've been willing to go. The cold war is over, the danger of mutual assured destruction has abated, but our country is full of people who are busier than ever, not only planning but yearning for the end of the world. Adler's Y2K story here is cryptic but scary. It suggests powerfully that it's *weird* out there, and that American life does something to people, including some heroic and noble people, to turn them weird. Adler is a great reporter: she can let go of the boundaries between herself and her weird subjects, so as to help us enter their world, and know that sooner or later she can get back to who she is. Most of us around her age know we have survived by bringing our inner weirdnesses under control. But if jaytalking flourishes again, who knows what birds will migrate, or what songs will break out, or how well we will control our responses? Couldn't a seriously critical culture open up some pretty scary floodgates? The Weimar Republic was probably the most brilliant critical culture in history—*Oy*! Who will protect us from what we might want? Adler, who knows the need for protection, invokes Ms. Frizzle, star and comic hero of *The Magic School Bus* series. Ms.F., teacher, driver, guide to many under-

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worlds, imagines us as children who want to grow. She entices the kids in her class to go as far as they can, but assures their parents she will bring them all back home. Are we sure the goddess is driving? If so, when do we start?

Will our tree grow in Brooklyn? Like Betty Smith's immortal hero, Francie Nolan, Rachel Neumann is covering the waterfront by the Williamsburg Bridge.

Nothing she sees on the streets looks like a miracle, but she isn't giving up and going home to watch TV or go online. She has a lot of ideas, but none of them is overpowering and irresistible, and the "resistance isn't coalescing" as it used to. But really, the horrors that evoked that resistance—war in Vietnam, nuclear Doomsday—had a fallout that twisted and poisoned resisters' souls. I mean, we did what we had to do, some of it really helped, *je ne regrette rien,* but the crushing imperatives of the cold war are not a state I would wish on anyone I cared for. If Rachel and her children can look out at the bridge, the harbor, the city, and not instantly imagine them in flames, it sounds like real progress to me. Down the road she will find more people out there with her youthful energy and generosity of spirit and communication skills, and you know the left will live. ●

Carlo Rosselli
SOCIALIST HERETIC AND ANTIFASCIST EXILE
Stanislao G. Pugliese

Carlo Rosselli (1899-1937) was one of the most charismatic and influential of European antifascist intellectuals. Born into a wealthy Jewish family, and abandoning a promising career as a professor of political economics, he devoted his considerable fortune and ultimately his life to the struggle against fascism. In this work, the first biography of Rosselli in English, Stanislao Pugliese skillfully interweaves the strands of heresy, exile, and tragedy in Rosselli's life.

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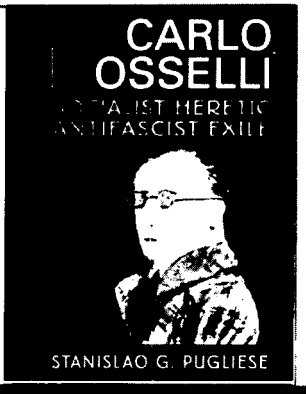

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Dissent

Rolling the Union On

John Sweeney's Movement Four Years Later

Harold Meyerson

Twice since John Sweeney became president of the AFL-CIO, the federation has held national conventions, and on each occasion Sweeney's keynote address has been preceded by the same distinctive introduction. In 1997 in Pittsburgh, and again in 1999 in Los Angeles, workers from successful organizing drives have paraded past the podium while their stories, and their numbers, are shouted to the assembled delegates. Only then, with all the workers arrayed in the front of the hall, does Sweeney step forward to speak.

One can only imagine the mix of majesty and bombast with which John L. Lewis would have capped so theatrical an occasion. With Sweeney—possibly the single flattest speaker the Bronx has ever produced—the moment almost instantly deflates. As soon as he begins speaking, the very idea that this charismatically-challenged figure is in some way responsible for the tumultuous procession—let alone the rebirth, however provisional, of American labor—seems absurd on its face.

It is, however, true. More than any labor leader since Lewis, John Sweeney has changed the direction of America's unions, altered what it is they do and say, whom they recruit, whom they hire, whom they embrace as allies, and whom they elect as their leaders. To be sure, the transformation of American labor, as Sweeney and those around him take pains to point out, is very much a work in progress; it has been fully registered at fewer than half-a-dozen of the federation's sixty-eight unions, and partly registered at maybe half-a-dozen more. The percentage of the workforce that is unionized has finally stopped its forty-five-year slide this year—at an anemic 13.9 percent—but it hasn't moved upward yet. Unemployment may stand at a thirty-year low, but the percentage of private sector workers in unions is so low—just under 10 percent—that wages are behaving as if unemployment were at 8 percent, not 4 percent. This October, as the NASDAQ hit record highs every other day, the average wage of the American worker increased by exactly one cent. Labor's penetration of the new, high tech economy remains infinitesimal.

And yet, by any number of measures, American labor is coming back. Last year, the movement organized 450,000 new workers; this year's figure will top 500,000—signaling a net gain of between 100,000 and 200,000 new members when the losses from deindustrialization are factored in. In the electoral arena, labor beat back the GOP's assault last year by defeating ballot measures, most notably California's Proposition 226, which would have curtailed unions' capacity to wage political campaigns. In the battle over the emerging rules of the global economy, the AFL-CIO is the linchpin of a transnational alliance of unions, environmental groups, and human rights activists that has finally begun to challenge the supremacy of the "Washington consensus" for free trade. In the battle for the political allegiance of America's new immigrants, labor has become the chief vehicle of immigrant socialization and mobilization in cities and mill towns.

Above all, John Sweeney's union movement is reinventing American liberalism—and not a moment too soon. When Sweeney announced his insurgent candidacy for the AFL-CIO presidency in the spring of 1995, Bill Clinton's recent pronouncement that "the era of big government is over" seemed to stamp the entire decade as a time of conservative ascendancy and liberal collapse. Sweeney's own campaign

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slogan, "America needs a raise," didn't initially seem much of a counter—nor the labor movement much of a rock on which liberals could rebuild their church.

As the decade ends, though, the emphasis that Sweeney and his movement have placed on the persistence of poverty amid prosperity, on the growing disparity in wages and incomes, on a social unionism that has seen them become the tribune and the organizers for low-wage America, has refocused liberal thought and managed to push the entire political spectrum to the left. A new left, focused on the plight of poverty-wage workers here and abroad, has arisen on the campus and in the pulpit; Congress, statehouses, and city halls have been raising the minimum wage and enacting living wage ordinances, even as they have consigned welfare to the dust; both Democratic presidential candidates campaign on strengthening the right to organize, and even George W. himself expresses concern for the working poor, though not to the point of actually supporting a hike in the minimum wage. "Class" has returned to the American political lexicon, and multiracial class consciousness to the liberal sensibility—for which the new model labor movement can justly take a bow.

THE DAY AFTER Sweeney assumed the federation presidency at its 1995 convention, he told his first press conference that the standard to judge him by would be the renewed growth of the movement. That had, after all, been the *raison d'être* for his candidacy. The very fact that Sweeney had emerged as the candidate of the anti-Kirkland forces was the result of his success in nearly doubling the size of his own union, the Service Employees (SEIU), during the Reagan-Bush years, while membership in nearly every other private sector union was spiraling downward. (The SEIU is half-public, half-private.) As well, the tacticians of Sweeney's campaign were drawn disproportionately from the organizing directors of the rather small number of unions that actually organized.

But arresting labor's sickening slide required nothing less than convincing the federation's constituent unions—not just the sixty-eight internationals but their thirty thousand locals—that they had to change what it was they did. For decades, working for a union meant servicing the needs of the members. Now, it meant organizing new members, while the existing members either made do with less attention or learned to service themselves.

This meant that the first task of Sweeney's federation was missionary work—convincing member unions, first, that they would either change or die and, second, that they *could* change. The Organizing Institute (OI), which trained new organizers and served as the medium to publicize best practices, had begun this work during the last years of the Kirkland regime (over the objections of some major figures within his administration, but with the support of then Secretary-Treasurer Tom Donahue). Upon assuming the presidency, Sweeney created an organizing department within the federation, funneled a sizable piece of the federation's budget to that department, and appointed OI director Richard Bensinger as its first head. Bensinger was replaced last year by veteran SEIU organizer Kirk Adams—a decision that had more to do with conflicting management styles than with any federation downgrading of the importance of organizing—but Bensinger's tenure clearly marked the Missionary Period of the Sweeney era. Bensinger went from city to city, union to union, with a presentation that demonstrated in ghastly detail where unions would be headed unless they redefined themselves as organizing entities, that offered federation assistance for making that change, and that showcased ways that other unions had weathered the transition.

At the outset, there wasn't a whole lot to showcase. The SEIU under Sweeney was spending roughly a third of its resources on organizing; his successor there—former organizing director Andy Stern—has raised that figure to a breathtaking 47 percent, which required dismantling a number of existing departments to free up the resources. The Communications Workers (CWA), Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE), and the garment and textile workers (UNITE) all had thriving organizing programs spread unevenly across their internationals. And that, as far as

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organizing went, was pretty much that.

(One change in the Sweeney era has been the rise of the master organizer within the union hierarchy. Not only has Stern become SEIU's president, but John Wilhelm, the organizing genius of Las Vegas, has become HERE president; UNITE's premier organizer, Secretary-Treasurer Bruce Raynor, is slated to become UNITE president within the next two years; and CWA's longtime organizing director Larry Cohen is clearly a major candidate to succeed president Morty Bahr. Not since the forties—the last period of union growth—has organizing expertise been considered a criterion for heading a union.)

TODAY, the number of internationals devoting serious resources to organizing has increased—though not hugely. The Steelworkers have appropriated $40 million over the next two years, chiefly to rebuild their strength in steel. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has allocated $35 million, much of that to a campaign to unionize Head Start workers. The auto workers (UAW), the Machinists, and the Teamsters have also beefed up their organizing programs, as, to a lesser degree, have some of the building trades unions (the Operating Engineers have set aside a $15 million organizing fund).

But money and will do not in themselves guarantee results; if they did, the above list would be a good deal longer. Unions' success rate in private sector campaigns, as measured by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), still hovers around 50 percent; last year it was 51 percent. In the public sector, it soars to 85 percent—and not because private sector Fed Ex workers are libertarians while public sector postal workers are collectivists. The reason is that private sector employers all but routinely violate the National Labor Relations Act to suppress organizing drives. One study by Cornell's Kate Bronfenbrenner shows that one-third of companies currently engage in illegal firings of workers involved in such campaigns—up from just 8 percent in the sixties. Indeed, the increase in organizing activity in the Sweeney era has produced a corresponding increase in the number of anti-union consultants who advise employers on how to break the law. (I know of no other field of law where an industry has arisen to offer instruction in how best to violate it.)

Unions that persist in private sector organizing absent the additional leverage of political moxie or bargaining-table clout have a very tough time. I recently spoke with the head of the Los Angeles district council of Painters, who told me of a multi-year campaign to place and sign up recruits on jobs funded with public money. By the terms of the state's building-trades labor law, contractors for the state can't sack workers for belonging to a union, but apparently it happens all the time, at which point the Painters take the contractors to court—a routine that's been going on for several years now. "I'd like to think we've increased membership [over that time]," the Painters official told me. "We've certainly increased the number of lawsuits we file."

For years, unions have been responding to this grim reality by organizing whatever they could in the public sector. Starting at the University of Michigan, the UAW has become a lead union for organizing teaching assistants at public universities (they recently picked up 10,000 at the University of California). This November, nearly 100,000 public employees in Puerto Rico voted to join unions, after a change in the law finally enabled them to unionize.

But there are three problems with the emphasis on public sector workers. First, there aren't too many other Puerto Ricos—untrod, easy organizing terrains—to go around. Second, there's a huge disparity between the unionization rates of private (9.6 percent) and public (37.5 percent) sector employees. When times get tough, it is not clear that a deunionized private sector will be eager to pay taxes to support a unionized public sector. When times are good, the increasing concentration among public sector workers means that more and more union workers are far removed from those economic sectors where incomes and wages are really rising. The third problem is that predominantly private sector unions that find it easier to fish in the public sector waters may well grow weaker in their core industries—and find it correspondingly more difficult to win decent

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contracts there.

"Unions have to figure out what their base is," says AFL-CIO organizer Steve Lerner, who for years headed up SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign. "For unions whose base is dying, no one is saying, 'Go die with your base.' But you should have a clear alternative target. If you're the Nehru jacket union, no one wants you to die with the Nehru jackets, but that doesn't mean you hop around to postal and shipyard workers."

SOME UNIONS are reconcentrating within their base. The Steelworkers have hired organizers and hope to use their bargaining clout with the core steel companies to expand into newer, nonunion portions of the industry. The UAW's recently completed negotiations with the Big Three auto makers included efforts to get the companies to lean on their nonunion parts suppliers to lessen their resistance to organizing, and to get Daimler-Chrysler to agree to recognize the union at its Alabama Mercedes plant if a majority of workers signed cards affiliating themselves with the union (a procedure called "card check," which supersedes the need for an NLRB election, and the anti-union campaign that management usually wages during that time). The UAW was only partially successful, though—failing to get card check at either Mercedes or the suppliers, but winning the right to meet with workers inside the Mercedes plant and securing a promise that the Big Three will tell their suppliers not to threaten job cutbacks during the organizing drives.

Nonetheless, "bargaining to organize" is increasingly becoming one of the leading—actually, one of the few—organizing strategies. The model was both pioneered and perfected by John Wilhelm and HERE in Las Vegas, where the union agreed to some work rule changes at hotels at which they already had contracts in return for card-check recognition at the new hotel next door owned by the same management. That was only one piece of HERE's strategy: the Vegas local also waged a six-and-a-half-year strike at one hotel that refused to negotiate, without a single worker ever crossing the picket line. Through militancy on the line—and a very supple touch in bargaining—the union made Vegas the only American city with a decently paid service sector.

Bargaining to organize was also a chief feature of the 1998 negotiations between the CWA and AT&T and the Baby Bells—and the CWA won signal breakthroughs at the table. Its goal was to break into the new, nonunion sector of the communications industry, in particular, all the wireless phone companies that had sprung up alongside—and were largely owned or controlled by—Ma Bell's progeny. AT&T agreed to hold "expedited" elections in its wireless companies, meaning it wouldn't have the time to wage an all-out anti-union campaign. Southwestern Bell Corporation agreed to card check and Bell Atlantic to automatic recognition. As a result, the CWA has unionized roughly six thousand new workers in the wireless industry, with a good deal more on the way—one of the very few instances in which unions have been able to gain a foothold in the new economy.

The much enhanced political clout of the union movement since Sweeney took the helm is only now beginning to pay dividends in organizing. The federation's political operation, headed up by former CWA and Labor Department staffer Steve Rosenthal, today inspires the same admiration among campaign operatives and elected officials that the Christian Coalition's did five years ago. By training and deploying hundreds of congressional district coordinators across the nation, mobilizing tens of thousands of volunteers to walk precincts and staff phone banks, the Federation was in good part responsible for the Democrats' House pickups in the 1996 and 1998 elections. Recently, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce paid the AFL-CIO's political division the ultimate compliment: it announced it would try to reshape its own program in the image of the federation's.

The federation's newfound election-day prowess was quickly translated into heightened legislative power. In 1993, after all, labor had been unable to derail the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), though the Congress was controlled by Democrats and the economy was shaky. In 1997, when the administration's fast-track trade proposal came before Congress, Republicans held sway and the economy was strong: by every measure but

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one, fast-track went to the Hill in a more propitious political environment than NAFTA had. But fast-track never came to a vote, since fully 80 percent of House Democrats opposed it. The difference was that labor's political muscle was respected in 1997, as it had not been in 1993.

Leveraging its political power into organizing victories has proved more complicated than affecting legislative votes, but it is certainly beginning to happen. Building on its close ties to the congressional Democratic leadership, the AFL-CIO has made a number of presentations to the Democratic caucuses, featuring workers whose attempts to unionize led to their firings. The need to toughen employer sanctions in the National Labor Relations Act and to make organizing a less hazardous activity has been impressed upon Democratic legislators for the past four years. Two Democrats who've evidently been impressed are Al Gore and Bill Bradley, both of whom regularly speak about their commitment to making organizing easier.

THE SINGLE most notable organizing victory of the past several decades—the unionization of 74,000 homecare workers in Los Angeles earlier this year—was actually more the result of SEIU's political smarts and power than it was of any organizing legerdemain. Over time, the union had to persuade the state legislature, the governor, and the LA County supervisors to designate the county as the employer of record and to establish a board with whom the workers—hired by tens of thousands of sick, disabled, and elderly individuals, but paid by a combination of federal, state and local government funds—could bargain collectively. The largest and most politically active AFL-CIO union in the state, the SEIU injected itself into countless political campaigns over a twelve-year period, established an independent support group of clients with whom it negotiated a series of worker-patient understandings, and plunked a cool two million dollars into Gray Davis's successful gubernatorial campaign.

To coordinate the campaign over the past several years, SEIU tapped David Rolf, who, though still in his twenties, had already made a name for himself by running some of the union's most successful political and lobbying campaigns. Rolf had the union play a key role in the state legislative and county supervisorial elections of 1996 and 1997, finally securing all the necessary legislation to enable the homecare workers to organize and bargain. He then ran a political-canvass-type campaign to reach out to the workers in their homes, since no two of them had a common worksite. Rolf may be the most successful union organizer since Bob Travis headed up the UAW's drive in Flint in 1937, but he's currently self-employed as a political consultant. The biggest organizing victory of our time was brought about by a stunning display of political skills.

SEIU, HERE, and UNITE may be the most successful models of organizing unions, but there's another model of successful organizing that relies even more heavily on politics. The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor—the 800,000-member central labor council in LA, second in size only to New York's—has become, through a combination of accident and moxie, one of the most strategically savvy and aggressive organizing centers in the movement. About six months after Sweeney became national AFL-CIO president, Miguel Contreras, a seasoned HERE official with roots in the United Farm Workers, became leader of the LA County Fed upon the death of his predecessor. Contreras came to power just as Latino voters were beginning to enter the political process in large numbers, determined not to let another calamity such as 1994's Proposition 187—then-Governor Pete Wilson's anti-immigrant ballot measure—befall them again. With a number of LA unions already active among immigrant workers—the SEIU with janitors, homecare, and hospital workers; HERE with hotel maids and cooks—the labor movement was one of the very few established entities with any entrée into that economically depressed community.

In short order, the federation's political operation became the powerhouse of LA politics—waging massive registration, mobilization, and get-out-the-vote campaigns among two distinct but overlapping groups: union members and newly registered Latino voters. Often it backed union-oriented Latino candidates against the candidates of a more nationalistic

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Latino political establishment; almost invariably, its choice prevailed. By 1999, thirteen of fourteen federation-backed candidates had been elected in local contests, and the federation was key to the state's rejection of the union-busting Proposition 226 on the 1998 ballot. Exit polls showed Latinos opposing 226 by a 75 percent to 25 percent margin: 6 points more than the margin by which blacks opposed it, and a dozen points more than the margin by which Latinos opposed the banning of bilingual education, another measure on that year's ballot. In short, the federation had created a powerful labor-Latino alliance that is already reshaping California politics.

(The growing number of organizing drives, not just in LA but across the nation, that focus on immigrant workers is also producing an important shift in the movement's position on immigration laws. In the mid-1980s, the national AFL-CIO took a position in favor of employer sanctions to discourage the employment of undocumented immigrants. Today, those sanction are frequently used by employers to break up immigrant-led organizing drives. At this fall's national convention in Los Angeles, the AFL-CIO began the process of reversing its previous position—and solidifying its new position as the immigrant worker's most powerful champion.)

WHAT MAKES the Los Angeles Fed a model for organizing, however, is that it systematically uses its political power to build organizing drives. LA is an unusual terrain in that organizing internationals dominate the labor landscape: SEIU, with hundreds of young organizers at work among health care workers, airport employees and janitors, and HERE, a far smaller union but one that has built a remarkable support network among local clergy and liberal activists. Virtually alone among the nation's local labor councils, though, the federation has become a mini-version of the national AFL-CIO, with its own organizing department that helps unions develop organizing strategies and resources. And it has parlayed its political chits into a range of appointments on local governing boards of city facilities such as the airport—where it helped persuade such bastions of nonunionism as the Duty Free Shops and the W.H. Smiths stores to agree to card-check recognition of workers.

The Fed has also worked closely with the local Living Wage coalition, which has convinced numerous large and small cities around LA to enact living wage ordinances. In Santa Monica, the coalition is likely to prevail upon the left-leaning city council to enact the first such ordinance that applies to certain private sector employers with no city contracts—as part of a campaign to unionize that city's luxury beachfront hotels. Other legislation is moving at various levels of government that would forbid government contracts to any companies that employ anti-union consultants.

The list of industries targeted for organizing in LA—health care, tourism, building services, food processing—is emblematic of union priorities everywhere: it consists almost solely of industries that can't relocate. But Contreras also hopes to interest industrial unions in returning to the LA manufacturing sector. Los Angeles remains the largest concentration of manufacturing in the nation, though its once huge—and unionized—aerospace and auto sectors have been decimated (aerospace) or eradicated altogether (auto). Today, more than 600,000 workers are employed in largely low-wage worksites, making everything from computer components to racing wheels to high- and low-end fashions. The worksites are generally small and fiercely competitive; organizing shop-by-shop would never succeed, because a few unionized shops could not survive in a sea of nonunion manufacturing. But by building a steadily rising level of pro-union sentiment among local officials and civic groups, within the Catholic church and among immigrant workers generally, Contreras has long-range aspirations of converting much of low-wage LA into the world's largest "hot shop"—organizer parlance for a worksite where the workers are itching to unionize—and convincing the manufacturing internationals to come back to industrial Los Angeles.

The LA "model" is not easily replicable elsewhere, though in recent months Central Labor Councils in other cities have been dropping by to pick up pointers. Most major American cities, however, remain heavily Democratic and heavily nonunion within their service and

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retail sectors. There are certainly lessons from LA about maximizing political strength that can be applied in other cities—just as there are lessons from the SEIU that can be learned by other internationals.

Labor's qualified success at becoming a tribune for the bottom end of the proletariat has a faint echo at the top end as well. As Marx predicted in the *Manifesto*, organized capitalism has turned doctors into wage slaves. (How Marx managed to foresee the rise of Health Maintenance Organizations I will leave to Marxologists.) The past year has seen not just votes by the national delegate body of the American Medical Association to study forming a union, but decisions by smaller groups of doctors to join up with existing unions. Currently, 45,000 of the 600,000 American physicians are unionized—a rate (7.5 percent) that is two points higher than that among service workers generally.

Throughout high tech and the bulk of the new economy, however, unions remain a blip at best. The problem is partly cultural, but also partly structural: high tech is disproportionately an industry of part-time and job-hopping workers, and unions have trouble evolving a successful strategy for a proletariat that's just passing through. Although 17.5 percent of the total U.S. workforce is employed part time, for instance, fully 40 percent of the Silicon Valley workforce is composed of temps and part-timers. Amy Dean, the industrious and innovative head of the Santa Clara County (which includes Silicon Valley) Central Labor Council, argues that a craft or occupational, rather than an industrial, union structure makes more sense in such a terrain. Her Working Partnerships organization offers its several hundred members portable benefits, constant training in new programs and operating systems, and a unionized hiring hall.

Dean is probably right that such a structure makes sense for the torrent of temps who wash through high tech, but the craft structure is not in itself a panacea. The building trades, with just such a structure, have seen a tremendous erosion in membership over the past four decades as contractors increasingly turned to nonunion workers. The craft structure may be a necessary condition to organizing the new economy; it is not, as Dean herself readily asserts, a sufficient one.

In view of all the difficulties that still vex organizing campaigns, many unions have not yet made the leap to an organizing mode. Even among those that have, there are some—the Food and Commercial Workers and the Teamsters among them—that still seem to lack a clear strategic vision for where and how to rebuild their strength in core industries. Where union members are aging and nearing retirement, as they are disproportionately in large industrial unions, it is difficult to persuade them to make concessions in bargaining or to divert resources to organizing campaigns that won't pay dividends until after they're gone. (Steelworker president George Becker did yeoman work convincing his members to authorize this change in strategies.)

"What Sweeney is saying is it can't be just five unions, or ten, that reshape themselves into organizing unions," says federation organizing director Kirk Adams. "Twenty or thirty have to move to this type of effort if we're going to grow. Last year, unions experienced a net growth of 100,000 members; this year it will go to 200,000. But we have to get to a net increase of 500,000 members to increase our density, what with the workforce growing at 2 million a year. That means we have to organize a million new members a year. We've got a ways to go yet."

If the AFL-CIO's emphasis on organizing is something new (or something so old it seems new), its endorsement of Al Gore is right out of the playbook that labor's been using for years. Just before its October convention, John Sweeney told his colleagues on the executive council that they had asked Gore for many things over the past seven years and Gore had usually delivered; he had promoted the right to organize more avidly than any political leader of comparable stature; and it would damage labor's credibility not to stand by such a friend. A number of the union presidents remained unpersuaded that Gore was the best, or even the better, candidate—but if Sweeney wanted it, they would go along. At the convention, where Gore was endorsed, I asked one normally voluble leader his presidential pref-

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erence. "I support John Sweeney," he said—and scurried away.

But mobilizing union members for Gore may prove the trickiest challenge the political operatives at the new AFL-CIO have yet encountered. They don't have Newt Gingrich or Proposition 226 to kick around anymore. Such negative campaigning as they'll undertake will be directed against George W.—not Bill B. But because Bill B.'s record isn't a whole lot different from Al G.'s, the main Gore selling point may inevitably become the rather circular argument that he has labor's endorsement. That was the same argument the old-model AFL-CIO made for Walter Mondale in 1984, and it didn't work. Moreover, some federation political powerhouses have yet to endorse Gore. Unless and until the SEIU, the UAW, and the Teamsters come aboard, labor will have to campaign in such key primary states as California and Michigan without its major players.

The Gore Problem at the UAW and the Teamsters is his position—the Clinton administration's position—on trade. (Bradley, of course, is even more zealously pro–free trade than Gore.) Sweeney has performed a bit of a balancing act on trade: consistently making the case for a more regulated, humane global economy subject to democratic oversight, criticizing the administration when it has pressed its quest for free trade with nations that permit child- and forced-labor, but declining to join its harshest critics, within and without the labor movement. Though the federation has to be prodded on occasion by the more trade-impacted internationals to draw clearer distinctions on trade with the White House, the AFL-CIO has nonetheless become the linchpin of the anti-free-trade forces—not just nationally but globally. Particularly notable are a series of speeches Sweeney has delivered in the belly of the beast—to the annual mega-capitalist conclave in Davos, Switzerland; to the Council on Foreign Relations; to the Trilateral Commission—in which he has demanded protections for the right to organize, and for stronger labor and environmental standards, in every trade agreement. The federation's Web site cites the 1938 federal Fair Labor Standards Act—the first national minimum wage law—as a model for what now needs to be done at a global level. And much as European socialists call on the European Union to develop transnational social protections and dispel the "democracy deficit" that characterizes its decision-making process, so Sweeney calls on the World Trade Organization to develop its own global social protections, and to supplant the backroom deals in which the rules of global trade are currently set with "open covenants, openly arrived at." Sweeney has extended the Wilsonian vision of international relations to the realm of transnational economics.

SWEENEY'S TENURE at the federation has coincided with a growing public uneasiness at the persistence, and virulence, of poverty in the midst of plenty. Oddly enough, the best efforts of the new labor movement and the worst compromise of the Clinton presidency have combined to put a new, more compelling face on the American poor.

Give the devil his due: as policy, welfare reform is a tremendous threat to the American poor, with potentially catastrophic consequences. But politically, it has made it safe in mainstream circles to be concerned about the poor again. Add to that labor's new interest in social unionism—in organizing and highlighting the plight of the poorest workers in America's cities, in promoting minimum wage hikes and living wage statutes and now immigrant rights, in rallying churches and campuses for these campaigns—and the whole image of America's paradigmatic poor person has undergone a sea change. The welfare mom is out; the hardworking immigrant parent is in—and the object of solicitude from the same political system that scrapped welfare. In one two-month period in 1996, Congress both abolished welfare and raised the minimum wage; while across the nation, the same city councils and county boards that have slashed welfare benefits have passed living-wage ordinances.

In some notable particulars, America's cities are ending the century much as they began it—with middle-income jobs dwindling, vast immigrant communities ghettoized into low-wage work, and the rich almost unable to comprehend their new fortunes. Now as then, the call of the social gospel is transforming the

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urban clergy: this past Labor Day, seven hundred pulpits participated in a labor-sermon project. Now as then, college students are devoting themselves to the cause of the poor. But they are not flocking to settlement houses this time around. In 1900, Samuel Gompers' s movement largely shunned the unskilled immigrant workers. Today, John Sweeney's movement, by embracing them, has also become the real-world connection of the campus left—sponsoring the Union Summer internships, the organizing jobs, and the antisweatshop campaigns that define the new generation of activism.

For younger Americans in particular, the decline of middle-income jobs and the dwindling of the middle-class majority are both personally experienced and viscerally understood. This growing chasm of class, and the growth of Sweeney's social unionism, are likely behind the increasing stature that unions hold, especially among the young. In polling conducted earlier this year by Peter Hart Research, respondents' positive view of unions was up to 39 percent, from 35 percent in 1993; their negative view had fallen from 34 percent in 1993 to 23 percent today. Respondents between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four, though, looked favorably on unions by a more decisive 37 percent-to-18 percent margin, and workers in the eighteen-to-thirty-four category who did not have a union in their workplace said they'd choose unions by a 54 percent-to-38 percent margin. The world is changing for American unions, even if labor law, and the willingness of many unions to organize despite it, has not.

Though it's not widely recognized, unions often determine the physical layout of major American cities. For most of the first half of this century, Detroit had the highest percentage among all large cities of single-family homes: built for auto workers who benefited, first, from Fordist wages and, secondly, from UAW wages. After World War II, similarly, the great housing tracts of Los Angeles were first clustered around the giant, unionized aerospace plants.

In the more bipolar economy of the past twenty years, however, no one has been building new housing for the new proletariat. Instead, they are compelled to cluster in rundown apartments and houses; in Los Angeles, there are probably more than two hundred thousand people living, all illegally, in garages. In only one American city do normally low-wage service sector workers make enough to buy their own homes: Las Vegas. There, as the HERE local has grown during the past decade from a little more than 10,000 members to a little more than 50,000, and won decent wages and benefits from the hotel-casinos that employ them, new housing tracts with their shimmering green lawns are stretching ever further into the desert. Critics of sprawl are doubtless, and rightly, appalled, but there's another story here—the physical creation of the first city in decades to boast a middle-class majority. Such a city, goodness knows, doesn't have to take the form of Las Vegas. But it cannot happen at all absent the kind of union power that, in the past few years, the American labor movement has been learning how to rebuild. ●

HAROLD MEYERSON is executive editor of *L.A. Weekly*.

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Socialism: Mission Accomplished or Mission Impossible?

Donald Sassoon

Those who discuss socialism confront two distinct but not incompatible strategies: the essentialist and the historical. The former, Weber-like, presents socialism as an ideal-type, deduced from the activities or ideas of those identified as socialists. Once the concept is constructed, it can be used to assess, to evaluate, and to compare different socialist organizations. Essentialism does not allow for historical change. When something new turns up—say, a revisionist interpretation—essentialists hoist the ideal-type onto the operating table, remove—if necessary—the bits that no longer fit, and insert the new ones. The concept of socialism can march on, rich with new meanings; social scientists, armed with a neatly repackaged ideal-type, produce books on the new socialism, and make academic publishers happy.

In the meantime, others insist on the old ideal-type, pronounce the revisions incompatible with true socialism, and then declare socialism dead. They write more books on the death of socialism and make academic publishers happy. Activists, unconsciously Weberian, often proceed in a parallel fashion. Either the new revisionism and its intelligent adaptation to the realities of an ever-changing world are exalted or there is bitter denunciation of yet another dastardly betrayal of the old faith.

The historical strategy has the same opening move—selecting organizations and thinkers that identify as socialist. Similarities and differences among them are then highlighted. However, no definition of socialism is required. Socialism becomes what socialists do. And no predictions can be made. The death of socialism, like that of feudalism, can only be proclaimed when it is no longer a matter of dispute, that is, when there are no socialists left except for the usual cranks, who, along with flat-earthers, may still inspire some anthropological interest.

While the essentialist strategy is overwhelmingly concerned with definition, the historical one is obsessed with change and causality—why do socialists behave as they do? Ideology is regarded as an integral part of the history of socialism. How theory and practice have been modified over time is the central preoccupation of the historical approach. It is thus much less judgmental than essentialism. But it risks a determinist version of events—whatever happened *had* to happen—and it is useful to remember that within any set of circumstances things can develop differently.

Two Socialisms

At the beginning of the twentieth century socialists knew that their movement was contingent on capitalist society. Many Marxists thought of socialism as the state of affairs that would succeed capitalism, but they also noticed that the fastest growing capitalist society in the world, the United States, did not have a socialist movement. They were also aware that there was only an embryonic socialist party in Britain, the most developed capitalist state in Europe. In the meantime, some of Europe's more agrarian societies, such as Italy and Finland, had fairly strong and electorally successful socialist parties.

In Russia the movement was divided—like the whole of the Russian intelligentsia—between westernizing and Slavophile tendencies. The westernizers assumed that the duty of socialists was to accelerate the development of capitalism. Only capitalism, they thought, could provide the material preconditions for a further advance toward socialism. The slavophiles imagined that Russia would be able

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to skip Western-style capitalism. There was, however, a notable point of consensus: everyone believed that Russia's real problem was modernization; the dispute was over whether this should be left to the capitalists themselves or to the state. Much of Russia's subsequent history—from war communism to the New Economic Policy, from Stalin's five-year plans to the limited and inadequate economic reforms of the 1960s and 1970s—can be seen as a dispute over the appropriate mix of state and market. This developmental socialism can be viewed as an ideology of modernization. Its final goal was a socialist society, but the immediate aim was to fashion an industrial society in circumstances unlike those of the West. In Russia, the argument went, socialists would do the industrializing, or foreigners would (and the country would become a colony), or no one would (and the country would stagnate). Communism was the consequence.

THE OTHER VARIETY of socialism—my main concern in this essay—can be conceived as an attempt to regulate capitalism. This came to be known as social democracy. The contrast between socialism as development and socialism as capitalist regulation is, of course, far more profound than this. The former exhibited marked authoritarian features, an intolerance of dissent and of pluralism which matched, and in some cases exceeded, capitalist authoritarian regimes. In contrast, social democracy presumed political democracy, pluralism, and human rights. Social democrats often point out that developmental socialism (that is, communism) was never liberal, while social democracy was never dictatorial.

It is tempting to agree and to leave it at that. Unfortunately, this would leave a number of problems unsolved. The passage from premodern to modern society, at least in its initial phase, has seldom been accompanied by democracy and human rights as we would understand them today. Even in Britain or in the United States—not to mention Germany and Japan—suffrage was nonexistent or severely restricted, freedoms seriously limited, and trade unions banned or subjected to harsh control. In some instances the process co-existed with slavery and genocide (the United States), racism, colonialism, and rigid authoritarianism (for instance in Japan) and one-party rule (for instance, until relatively recently, in Taiwan and South Korea). Social democracy, where it existed, was in the forefront of the struggle for democracy and human rights, goading the European liberal parties—then far less democratic—and even the conservative parties—then barely democratic, toward political reforms. Social democrats did not, however, believe that modernization, capitalist development, and productivity were their concern. They came to power only when the first phase of industrialization was over, unlike the communists, who came to power before. It does not follow that communist authoritarianism was justifiable or inevitable. The point, rather, is that these two forms of twentieth century socialism are, finally, not comparable. Social democrats have ruled only where capitalism was well-established and political democracy was the common property of the main political parties. Communists had to develop industrial societies. Social democrats (or "socialists," since I shall use the two terms interchangeably) had to manage them. Communists prevailed in less developed societies, socialists in developed market economies.

Individualism and Collectivism

The regulation of capitalism was not part of the original ideology of socialists; it is what they pursued in practice. Though their end-goal was a vaguely defined classless society, their short-term demands aimed at democratizing capitalist society, regulating the labor market (for instance, establishing the eight-hour work day), and socializing the costs of reproducing labor. This last goal is what we now call the welfare state. Social democrats' politics were informed by the values of equality, social solidarity, and the establishment of minimum standards of life. If all citizens were to be of equal worth, they all had to have the vote, had to be treated equally, and had to have the same rights. The ill, the unemployed, and the elderly were to be protected by a common fund, centrally administered and financed. The definition of the minimum standards of civilized life could not be left to the sphere of civil society, that is, to

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the arbitrariness of market forces. Instead, the state would ensure a system of social protection. This was also the basis for regulating the conditions of work, ranging from health and safety conditions to the length of the work day. Finally, the state had to be thoroughly democratized to accomplish these goals; it had to be detached from the exclusive control of the dominant classes.

The extension of democracy advocated by socialists was based not on class but on individualism. Universal suffrage, after all, assumes that all individuals have the same worth when voting. It is worth recalling this staunch individualism at a time when socialists are criticized for their fixation on class alone. Those who, at the turn of the century, defended a class conception of democracy were the (middle-class) liberal and conservative parties in Europe. They defended electoral systems that allocated votes on the basis of wealth. Throughout Europe they supported upper chambers in the national legislatures in which the upper strata were over-represented or the only people represented. They opposed the enfranchisement of the working class and of women.

Socialists were far more consistent defenders of individual democratic rights. The contractual relation between capitalist and worker was between individual and individual. In exchange for agreed-on wages, each worker undertook to perform a specific operation, in specific conditions, and for a specific length of time. This was the situation Marx and his followers called "formal" equality; agreements between juridically equal parties disguised massive inequality in power.

The creation of the welfare state entailed socialization of some of the costs of reproduction of the working class. The collective tax fund (to which the middle classes were expected to contribute disproportionately) or the forcible extraction of contributions from the capitalists could be used to help finance pensions, national insurances, and medical expenses. All these would yield obvious benefits for workers and their families, but it also allowed entrepreneurs to pay them less. Social democratic success in pursuing these aims differed from country to country. Much depended on the relative strength of the two contending classes (capitalists and workers), the wealth of the economy, the power and dominance of landed aristocratic interests, the prevailing political ethos, and the position of the Catholic church.

Socialists, Liberals, and the State

By the early twentieth century some of the short-tem aims of social democracy could be found in some form in the programs of other parties. So in some sense it was no longer possible, if it ever was, to establish a clear and permanent distinction between socialists and nonsocialists. The extension of democracy, the institution of the welfare state, and the reduction of the work day were socialist aims and policies, but one could always find similar demands by nonsocialists. "Socialist" measures were not the prerogative of socialists. Because it is possible to favor adequate pensions without championing a classless society, adequate pensions were acceptable to liberals and conservatives. Still, major differences remained.

Socialists were committed to the long-term goal of a postcapitalist society. They possessed a set of distinctive symbols; they advanced their demands in more radical ways than their competitors: socialists pursued and explored new forms of struggle (such as the political strike); they remained generally opposed to overt cooperation with the other parties; and with the exception of Britain, they were anticlerical. Socialists tried to distinguish themselves from what they regarded as a monolithic bourgeois bloc, while the incorporation by antisocialists of socialist demands continued to blur the definition of socialist policies. In this context, reformism triumphed among socialists. The prerequisite was the ability to detach demands from the bigger ideological package (like symbols and language).The link between ideological values and practical policies had to become vague, and thus amenable to renegotiation. Consistency may enable small sects to survive indefinitely, but it spells certain ruin for parties and movements with hegemonic ambitions.

So on one hand socialists put forward a realistic program that could appeal to as many people as possible; on the other they stressed

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what was absolutely distinctive and unique about their values. They knew successful policies were likely to be imitated and popular demands taken over by others. Socialists presented themselves as the authentic champions of reforms, while emphasizing that these were not ends in themselves but steps to a qualitatively different society. Thus their insistence on the final goal was not only part of a recruitment strategy aimed at intellectuals and others with millenarian aspirations. It was a convincing way to expand the appeal of limited reforms. Similarly, when socialists championed the working class, this was not just a matter of Marxist theory. It rested on the recognition that this social group was likely to be the chief champion of social and economic reforms.

THE STRUGGLES for democracy, social welfare, and the regulation of work gave rise to a fundamental feature of twentieth century socialism: statism. The latter provided much fodder for antisocialists, especially after the experiences of fascism, nazism, and Stalinism. Does not socialist statism pose similar perils? it was asked. Did not the welfare state, for all its compassion, systematically undermine freedom and incentives? Many socialists now think that there is an element of truth in such criticisms. But this is misleading. Statism, though an inevitable part of (reformist) socialist practice, was not integral to its ideology, to its commitment to a socialist end-goal. Throughout the nineteenth century, socialist movements were against the state. It was the state, they argued, that deprived workers of the right to vote; it was the state that produced legislation favoring entrepreneurs, the aristocracy, and the middle classes. The real statists, in the nineteenth century, were liberals (in the European sense) and conservatives. For liberals, the state was an instrument with which to attack traditional privileges and local powers, to clear the way for markets. For conservatives it was the main means to slow down liberal reform.

Acceptance of the state—not just as a concept, but as a useful coercive tool—came relatively late in the development of socialist thinking. There was, after all, an alternative. Powerful trade unions, without a political party, could struggle with employers over the length of the working day, the conditions of work, holiday pay, and so on. They could function as a pressure group and obtain concessions from governing bourgeois parties. This was certainly the British case prior to the Second World War. If on the European continent the eight-hour day was won on behalf of all citizens following principles of universal rights, in Britain this gain went to union members.

The commitment of socialists to the state grew as shorter term aims became more significant and end-goals receded into a more distant future. Universal suffrage made the state more receptive to change and more legitimate in principle. It enabled socialists to achieve political power by "capturing the state machine" and thus begin to implement reforms. And all this transformed industrial society. Both socialists and liberals shared positive assumptions about industrialism, but they differed on the relationship between the political system and industry. For classical European liberalism, the state's purpose was the removal of obstacles to the advance of industrial society. Once this was achieved, industry, as part of civil society, was to flourish on its own without interference. Socialists were ambivalent about civil society. Yes, they wanted workers to be as free as possible to organize and use collective action to achieve their demands. But they also believed that the uneven distribution of power and money within civil society significantly undermined political rights and equality.

After the First World War

In short, socialists regarded the state in two very different ways—either as an alien force or as machine that could be used for the redistribution of power. They hoped that in power they could control capitalism and eventually replace it. What they did not assume, at least not initially, was that they could manage capitalism over the long run. This notion came after World War I and established another zone of agreement between social democrats and liberals. Before the war, socialists did not contemplate a planned economy. They were in fact either quite silent or quite vague when it came to discussing the actual organization of socialism. The intellectuals were no help. Marx thought that a socialist economy would some-

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how run itself; it would be "the administration of things," whatever that means. Lenin piously suggested that a postal clerk could run it. Kautsky, like most social democrats of the time, believed that such issues could be resolved only when capitalism had fully developed and when the working class had acquired a superior culture and intellect. Bernstein declared he was not much interested in a socialist society and preferred to fight to improve the worker's conditions under capitalism. There were no plans to create a large public sector or to nationalize the economy.

The war changed things and not only for socialists. The isolation of socialists from bourgeois parties ended as socialists in France and Germany gave the defense of their state priority over international solidarity. Those same states were forced to manage their respective economies to an unprecedented extent. The idea of managing the capitalist economy was firmly installed on the agenda of liberals, conservatives, and socialists alike. And when, in the 1920s and 1930s, socialists finally entered government, it was always in coalitions with other parties (as in Sweden, France, Germany, Britain, and Spain). Consequently, some ideological barriers fell. As I have already noted, key reforms demanded by social democracy were now accepted by other political forces. Even some on the radical right incorporated demands for social welfare. Liberal, Catholic, and centrist forces accepted the principles of universal suffrage, though in some cases they still excluded women. Almost everyone accepted regulation of the work day.

This osmosis was further accelerated by the crisis of 1929. Liberals were no longer so certain that the state that interfered the least was the best. Massive unemployment seemed to verify the socialist claim that market forces did not naturally lead to equilibrium but rather to chronic instability. In Italy the fascist regime reacted to the crisis by taking over most of the banking system, but limited state intervention became acceptable even in Britain under liberals and conservatives.

After the Second World War

After World War II, social democratic parties emerged as major political contenders in virtually all democratic countries in Western Europe. Universal suffrage had become the unquestioned basis of all politics. Welfarism and full employment became state policies. The public sector was expanded throughout Western Europe by socialists in Britain, by Gaullists in France, and by Christian Democrats in Austria and Italy. (Ironically, the state-owned sectors remained small in the social democratic Nordic lands.)

It is hardly surprising that success in reform capitalist societies made socialists reluctant to forgo regulatory institutions: a large public sector, a powerful central bank, a mechanism of exchange control, a complex system of subsidies and regional policies, an intricate mechanism for the control of the labor market. These provided the pivotal link between socialism and capitalism and further reduced the importance of the original socialist end-goal. In any case that goal—as a socialist symbol—had diminishing popular appeal. The prosperity associated with capitalist growth, the establishment of full employment, the protections of the welfare state, and the failures of (and repression in) communist states eliminated much antagonism against capitalism itself. Parties of the democratic left discarded radical anticapitalist rhetoric as they underwent a general process of revision.

These developments allow us to see the main ideological achievement of modern socialism, but also its failure. The achievement lay in preventing untrammeled market capitalism from becoming the dominant ideology in European politics. Such capitalism only gained a position of relative hegemony in Margaret Thatcher's Britain. Even there it did so almost by stealth, abetted by an electoral system that works to the significant advantage of the largest party. The main ideological failure of social democracy is, ironically, linked to the basis of its initial practical success: having identified the state as capitalism's principal regulator, social democracy fought successfully to democratize and use it. But as capitalism (especially its financial organization) globalized, social democrats and the larger communist parties of the West remained wedded to a national conception of politics, seeking to secure their past achievements (welfare, education,

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civil rights) within the territorial boundaries of the state. The state, however, could no longer play its old role.

What Future for Socialism?

It is futile to predict the future of socialism. As we have seen, its real meaning has always been disputed. Since it can be endlessly redefined there is no reason why the term cannot be used indefinitely—or at least as long as capitalism carries on. The only condition for socialism's survival is the existence of significant political forces identified with it. And as long as socialism denotes the political regulation of capitalism, it will live on, frightening some, comforting others, regularly dying and yet reviving, an endless cause of debate and dispute. But socialism is a spent idea if it is conceived as an anticapitalist alternative order where resources are allocated strictly on the basis of need. The notion of socialism as a modernizer (the communist guise) able to catch up with capitalist industrial societies has been routed over the last twenty years.

So the socialism that survives is a distributive force, one that aims at allocating vital resources, such as health, culture, and education, outside of market mechanisms and on the basis of social citizenship. The electoral successes of European social democrats in the late 1990s imply a recognition by voters of the need to renegotiate the conditions of today's assertive global capitalism. Voters prefer such renegotiation to be done by political forces that historically have been suspicious if not hostile to the untrammeled markets.

Those of us who still call ourselves socialist face a striking difficulty: we need the economic growth and prosperity capitalism can generate, but capitalism does not need us. We now see that capitalist societies can sustain themselves by offering minimal social protections (as in the United States) or by devolving welfare activities to civil society—to large firms, families, and social groups (as in Japan). These alternative models, particularly the American one, have a striking capacity to strengthen themselves through crisis. In the meantime, socialists seem increasingly nervous about the term that defines them, both because of the multiple meanings of socialism, and the inability of socialists to fashion their own dominant meaning for the word. It is as if they have accepted a hegemonic definition of socialism provided by their enemies—a definition that disparages socialism for its alleged illiberalism, statism, anti-individualism, and dogmatism; for rewarding inefficiency and thwarting initiative. Ironically, this has happened at a time of social democratic electoral success. Socialists can lose elections and live to fight and win another day. If, however, they abandon control of their identity, history, and traditions, they cannot survive. Words like socialist may not matter much if the substance can be obtained under another guise. But some healthy skepticism toward capitalism must animate the practice of socialist reforms.

The lesson of the past, insofar as the past contains any lessons, is that the impetus to transform capitalism into the relatively civilized system that survives in the fortunate countries of the "North" of our planet, has always come from those dissatisfied with the absolute rule of market forces. Resistance to capitalism's seductions necessitates a social and political movement steeped in a tradition of critical dissent, not ashamed of its past identity, proud of its radical traditions, yet not afraid to innovate and adapt. ●

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Fin-de-Siècle Communism in Western Europe

Marc Lazar

THE END of the century, out of convenience or convention, because of nostalgia for the past or apprehension of the future, encourages the drawing up of balance sheets. This is especially so concerning communism, which played such a dominant role in social and political debate and haunted the imagination of the last hundred years. What remains of this phenomenon? My aim here is not philosophical and I don't pretend to be exhaustive. I simply offer some observations on the situation of parties in Western Europe that still lay claim to communism, in particular, in France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Germany. The small communist parties of Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands took advantage of the fall of the Berlin wall to take leave of communism definitively.

Decline

With the exception of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), heir to East Germany's communists, all the other communist parties are continuing a decline that began well before 1989. Those European communist parties that have not been reduced to small sects (as in Belgium or Great Britain) now fluctuate between 4 percent and 10 percent of the vote, whereas back in the early 1980s the Italian CP exceeded 25 percent, the French 20 percent, the Portuguese 15 percent, and the Spanish CP close to 10 percent. Once powerful because of such electoral strength, these parties have been marginalized. Membership has melted away. To take a single example, the French Communist Party (PCF), which boasted 520,000 members in 1978, now has less than 150,000. Of course, all the traditional West European political parties, except the British Labour Party, have registered declines in membership. But the communist parties have been more severely affected because their vitality rested on militants who are now fewer and fewer. In addition, the social composition of party membership, like that of its electorate, is characterized by a diminished presence of workers, peasants, and young people and, conversely, by an increase in unskilled workers of the public sector, the retired, and the elderly. Communist parties, structured around the proletariat, collective values, and the class conflicts of industrial society, are suffering the repercussions of prodigious societal transformations that, among other things, have brought about the disappearance of entire sectors of the old working class—particularly those in which the communists were strongly rooted—and have both changed the nature and organization of work and nourished individualism. The communist parties have been destabilized and their legendary effectiveness blunted.

The communists managed to construct around themselves an integrated system, including unions, mass organizations, associations under party control, and sometimes, with electoral victories, municipalities. They took under their wing particular professional categories and entire populations, protecting them against the dislocations of modernization, providing them with social services, and offering them a form of sociability and an identity. Naturally, all these factors also opened recruitment channels for the party. This extraordinary mechanism has now become slack, as each component, most notably the unions, has sought to secure its own autonomy, or has simply fallen apart. Communist parties no longer constitute powerful counter-societies, crucibles of culture and collective identity. While retaining some of their former characteristics, they have become parties largely like the others. As a result, their social presence has diminished.

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In France and Italy, the parties have more or less given up democratic centralism and have broken with their past monolithic authoritarian practices. Militants no longer regard the party as sacred, no longer have a relationship of *fides implicita* with their leaders (as Pierre Bourdieu once put it), and no longer have a religious conception of politics. Finally, the parties have found it enormously difficult to establish effective political strategies. In the seventies they were able to take the political offensive, often forcing other parties to define themselves in relation to communist aims. Now they are on the defensive and dependent on the choices of their rivals or allies. They maneuver from day to day without a genuine compass, trying to slow their decline and preserve the last vestiges of their former power. Their only satisfaction consists in using what remains of that strength to pressure, or even to harm the socialist left. In different ways, this is what Spanish, French, and Italian communists have done. The latter—the *Rifondazione comunista*, which split away when the mainstream of the old Italian Communist Party social-democratized itself as the Party of the Democratic Left—did not hesitate to bring down the center-left government of Romano Prodi in the fall of 1998. In like manner, the Greek communists made an alliance with the right in 1989 to weaken their socialist rivals. At the same time that they engaged in this maneuvering the Communist parties also have tried to redefine their ideology, identity, and project.

Reconstruction?

Communist attempts to reconstruct a coherent whole begin with ideological reformulation. The enterprise is risky, because communist ideology (the ideology of parties, not of thinkers) no longer survives in its past form as a meaningful representation of the world—it is no longer based on a "scientific" theory (Marxism), which also functioned as a secular faith. To borrow from Raymond Aron, it no longer blends, "more or less successfully," factual propositions and value judgments, and it barely expresses "a perspective on the world and a will turned toward the future." Ideology is no longer a factor of party cohesion; instead, it has become a source of discord, and the focus of incessant controversy among factions.

As a result, communist parties have stitched together an ideological patchwork from which a few brightly colored pieces stand out: anticapitalism, anti-imperialism, antifascism, and antiracism. The legacy of the USSR is generally obscured and written off. "Communism" is now presented as humanistic, democratic, and alternative. Marxism itself is now redefined as a radical utopia, somehow rooted not just in the social reality but in the soil of national histories. All these elements constitute both a type of continuity with Bolshevik communism as well as a break with it. Permanent tension is the consequence. Three examples serve to illustrate this.

Let us begin with anticapitalism. Communist parties have not given it up, quite the contrary. They assail the "neo-liberal offensive" and take malign pleasure in denouncing its "totalitarian" character. But they also try to set themselves apart from both the Soviet experience and from social democracy. While giving up on destroying capitalism, they still intend to "overcome" it, although they are careful not to specify what this means. They condemn forcefully privatizations and resolutely defend the public sector and the welfare state, all while admitting some revision may be needed—and never explains how far this might go. Does "overcoming capitalism" still mean the suppression of the market? If so, how? And what should replace it? No answers are provided.

Revolution is a second example of the continuities and breaks with communism. In the past, Communist parties claimed to be wholly revolutionary and denounced socialist reformism. Now things are more complicated. The political value of left reformism has risen and attacks on it have declined, in particular as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the retreat of its champions in the West. Leninism had provided the most thorough and effective (because it had the USSR) version of the critique of reformism. Leninists assailed social democracy as a species of social degeneracy (it supposedly expressed the interests of the aristocracy of the working class) and also

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as theoretical degeneracy (it abandoned so-called "true" Marxism). In our day, the revolutionary hypothesis has lost substance, even if its ritual incantation continues to seduce a small but significant fraction of left-wing opinion. Thus, although communist parties still lay claim to it, they have slightly modified its meaning. Revolution now means, according to a fashionable Gramscian interpretation, a long process that affects all spheres of society and culture. At the same time, Communist parties don't hesitate to appropriate the word "reformism" and associate it with revolution. For instance, the PCF's national secretary, Robert Hue, invokes the expression "revolutionary evolution" from Jean Jaurès, while the Italian Fausto Bertinotti, secretary of *Rifondazione comunista*, evokes "a reformist choice of alternative." In this way, the "New Communists," as they like to call themselves, still condemn reformism but in the name of another, very vague concept of reformism. They often make use of notions of structural reform that moved West European socialists of the sixties, sometimes reiterating, without always being aware of it, the "revolutionary reformist" arguments of such thinkers as Andre Gorz. Nevertheless, this development does not have unanimous support. The PCF and *Rifondazione comunista* do not reconcile "reformism" and "revolution" in quite the same way—not in theory or in practice. The Portuguese party still claims to be "revolutionary" in the traditional sense. In addition, factions within some communist parties (France, Spain, and Italy), continue to reject reformism and condemn the "revisionism" of their leaders.

THE THIRD example is captured by the war in Kosovo. War and peace is a classic issue for communist movements and has had two dimensions in their history. First, Bolshevism proclaimed itself warlike, in opposition to democratic socialism. Bolshevik language, organization, and practice in opposition—and even more so in power—attest to that warlike stance. From the beginning of the First World War, Lenin brilliantly grasped the immense import of the triptych of war-crisis-revolution. Since then, communists have believed that there are just wars—in particular the class war, which justified the resort to arms and class hatred. However, in a second phase, beginning in the late 1920s and growing thereafter, communists also used pacifist traditions to defend Soviet interests and for anti-imperialist purposes. This is why communists, without ever really being pacifists, conducted major campaigns for peace, between the world wars, in the 1950s, and against the French and later the American wars in Vietnam. At the same time, they continued to support armed struggle in the third world or to preserve the socialist camp "in case of imperialist threat" (Hungary, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968). In short, communism combined flexibly the struggle for peace with a warlike posture. The year 1989 perhaps initiates a third phase, marked by the disjunction of these two elements. In some countries where communism had been in power, ex-communist parties embraced nationalism and a fierce national-communism was the result. Milosevic is the prime example.

MEANWHILE, Western communists became completely pacifist, in an almost fundamentalist way. Robert Hue, at least early in the Kosovo campaign, declared that "this war is a fuckup (*connerie*)," an expression that disappeared, however, in the course of succeeding weeks. Italy's *Rifondazione comunista* sustained the same position, which had deep popular sympathy in Italy and allowed the party at once to criticize the government of the Democratic Left's Massimo D'Alema, and to be on the same side as a large part of the Catholic world. This type of pacifism appeared to combine condemnation of war as a means of conflict resolution—*any* conflict— with the language, close to that of the church, of loving one's neighbor. Notably, this communist pacifism did not do away with two distinctive elements from the past communist tradition: virulent anti-Americanism (and almost complete silence on Serbian crimes). Communists—more in Italy, Spain, and Greece than in France—also used Kosovo to encourage hostility toward socialist governments. Italian anti-NATO demonstrators marched with portraits of D'Alema represented as Hitler.

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Three Scenarios

If we look at the map of communist parties across today's European Union, a surprising picture emerges. Whereas communist parties were once strong in Southern Europe and in Finland, those experiencing significant growth are in the Netherlands and especially in Sweden. (The Swedish Party of the Left fluctuates between 12 percent and 16 percent of the electorate.) There is one important difference: the latter parties have largely broken with the communist legacy. Instead, they struggle to preserve the social welfare state, fight European integration, and defend demands of feminists and sexual minorities. But what will become of the other parties that remained communist in spirit? Three possibilities suggest themselves. The first is embodied in the Portuguese and Greek parties, which are shrinking into little more than remnants of their past selves. They want to preserve their crumbling fortresses and brandish their old torch regardless of social developments.

On one hand, the German PDS is similar, but is growing, mainly as a regional party concentrated in the east. On the other hand, it declared itself ready to enter into alliances with the Social Democratic Party. This brings it close to the second possibility, represented by the PCF and the Party of Italian Communists, a breakaway from the *Rifondazione comunista*. Despite their denials, these parties seem to be increasingly the left flanks of the dominant socialist parties, the Socialist Party in France and the Democratic Left Party in Italy. They try to make their voices heard while taking on governmental responsibility and changing dimensions of their political culture and identity. They attempt to be more constructive and "responsible" and, at least in France, to integrate classic left-wing material demands with some "post-materialist" ones (feminism, gay rights, immigrant rights, and, with more difficulty, ecology). For the moment, they are gaining few new supporters, although they often displease their traditional base, which is turning to the Trotskyist extreme left in France and *Rifondazione comunista* in Italy.

THIS BRINGS us to the third possible outcome. Whereas the French CP was once more revolutionary and the Italian party more reformist-revolutionary, *Rifondazione* has adopted extremely radical positions on virtually all questions. It provoked the fall of the Prodi government, foments social conflict at every opportunity, and even approved the theoretical part of the communiqué issued by the Red Brigades justifying the assassination of an adviser to the minister of labor last May. *Rifondazione* encompasses an explosive mixture of the sort of radicalism that always existed within Italian communism, of a revolutionary sensibility derived from maximalist socialism (embodied by the party's leader Bertinotti), of union members opposed to any social compromises, and of Trotskyists. Some members of the French CP would also like to follow this path by bringing together various forms of radical communism.

In the end, all Western European communist parties are troubled. They have been weakened and are far from the hopes of 1917. However, they are not dead. They still have some influence thanks to some of their efforts at ideological revival, and it has again become possible for some intellectuals to associate with them, despite the miserable legacy of communism in power. The Western parties still hope to profit from radical utopian aspirations and may deep down envisage a recomposition of the left of the left. It is likely that this would compel further painful changes and provoke new internal splits. Certainly, they count on exploiting the weaknesses of the reformist left. All this provides very few grounds for encouragement among communists in a very dark time for them. ●

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The Family: What Do We Really Want?

Michael Rustin

How should democratic socialists think about the family and its role in modern society? The essential problem is to find alternatives to individualist and marketized conceptions of social life. Solutions to this problem are most commonly sought in the political sphere. I want to argue that we cannot afford to neglect the sphere of the household, the informal sector, and relations of kinship and their chosen equivalents.

There are only a limited number of ways of organizing relations among human beings in society. The dominant one nowadays is by markets—the exchange of commodities and services by individuals (or entities behaving as if they were individuals) acting from self-interest. A second way is by political decision, enacted into law, and implemented through law-following organizations, often bureaucracies, sometimes professionals or enterprises acting under instruction from a government, or paid to carry out its wishes. Such legislated compliance may be undertaken under a democratic mandate or not. States were powerful in Europe long before democracy was the normal means of legitimating their power, and they still retain, as Ulrich Beck has pointed out, many attributes of their authoritarian heritage. Indeed, some might see democratic decision making as only the top-dressing, framing and to some degree giving a general steer to structures that remain for the most part more hierarchical than they are democratic.

And third, there is the form of relationship that depends on gift, barter, or submergence of the interests of the self under that of some larger entity. Families are one of the principal entities of this kind, but there are also friendships, voluntary associations, churches, even political associations, which may be founded on similar principles.

Within families, gift and barter are ways of arranging cooperation between members of the same generation (spouses or long-standing partners who combine their different resources, energies, and talents for their mutual benefit), but more particularly between different generations. Parents make many "gifts" of their time, energy, and devotion to their children. In their turn, children make similar gifts to their parents, especially when the latter become needy or infirm. The greater part of caring for the aged and ill who remain at home falls to family members, especially, of course, to women. Families are one of the principal means through which the obligations of one generation to another are recognized and enacted. Families are the primary locus of identification between generations.

Since it represents so substantial an alternative to commodification, individualism, and alienation, one might expect democratic socialists to be sympathetic to the family as a form of life. Marx famously described the family as a haven in a heartless world. Socialists have often used family relationships as a metaphor for the social relationships they wish to see, for example in the identification of fellow workers as "brothers" or "sisters" or in the ideas of community, mutual care, and responsibility that sustained the postwar project of the welfare state in Britain. The family has provided a rhetorical lexicon of norms with which socialists or progressives were supposed to identify. I remember a remarkable speech by Mario Cuomo to the Democratic convention many years ago that revolved around the ideal of America as an inclusive family.

Of course, matters are not so simple. Families have never existed in a free space, as a kind of voluntarist, cooperative alternative to the regimes of political hierarchy or market ex-

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change. Their forms of relationship and domination were, and are, structured by law. Their members were subject to differential opportunities and pressures to engage in market exchange. They existed within a cultural and normative order in which the institutions of religion had, and continue to have, an important role.

The effects of these various structures were to impose on the supposedly voluntary order of the family extremely constraining and unequal features. Women and children were even in the last century to a considerable degree the property of their fathers or husbands, who had legal license to control or punish them with violence. Men were more free to exchange their labor in the market than women, who in some social groups were confined to virtual captivity at home. Men were politically enfranchised long before women. Far from a setting in which voluntary cooperation for mutual benefit was the norm, families were often a setting of domination and subordination—of one gender over another and of one generation over another.

Given this inherited situation, it is not surprising that in the modern period the family has been subjected to a deep critique. Women in particular have organized and campaigned to weaken the constraints exercised in the name of family values but, as they saw it, largely in the interests of men. Political battles about divorce and abortion have been an important aspect of this. Members of both sexes, but perhaps especially women, have also voted with their feet, avoiding the constraining relationship of the family or removing themselves from it when it became intolerable. Thus, especially in northern Europe and north America, rates of divorce, and of cohabitation before or instead of marriage, have risen substantially, to the point that in Britain about one in three marriages is likely to end in divorce and in the United States one in two. Young people too have exercised their freedom to live independently. Whereas in Italy, France, and Spain, it remains normal for young men and women to live with their parents throughout their studies and until they marry, in Britain, America, and Scandinavia it has become common for young people to live in small communities of their own generation, on university campuses or in shared apartments.

This widespread exit from the family, and the wish of individuals to live more of their lives outside its constraints, generates demands that its functions be picked up by other agencies and forms of organization. Women have sought a new balance between the part of their lives spent within the family, and the part they spend in the labor market. Demands have been made that government agencies take on the responsibilities that families no longer meet. There are thus demands for more and earlier child care, and for public provision of residential care for old and infirm people. My own mother-in-law, aged ninety-two and very infirm, enjoys the assistance of no fewer than four paid, caring caretakers, employed indirectly by the local authority, visiting her in her sheltered housing in an inner London borough at different times of the day or week and giving her various kinds of help, with getting up, shopping, cleaning, laundry, and so on, in return for a small financial contribution from her. This despite the fact that she has two grown-up daughters living within fifteen minutes of her and a son less than an hour away. She gets a great deal of help from her family too, but the point is that the public system provides impressive services.

"The family" is still evaluated by many on the left in terms of the degree to which it impinges on the individual rights of its members. Claims made in terms of "family values" are critically reinterpreted as claims that enforce the covert domination of men over women. In Britain, concerns over the well-being of children are often formulated in terms of children's rights as individuals, even in terms of their implicit claims against their parents for injuries done to them. The common solution is to punish oppressive family members and remove the ill-treated children to hypothetical substitute families, found through procedures of fostering or adoption. It is unclear, however, whether the punitive, rights-based approach that has developed over recent years in England in response to anxieties about child abuse is in fact as helpful to children as a system of family law that gives priority to support for the family, such as is found in France.

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There are of course many ways in which families confer unequal powers and responsibilities on men and women. It is commonly the case that the more burdens the state or society assigns to the family (to look after children, the ill, or the old), the less freedom women will have. But it is also true that the case for greater equality between the sexes is often made more as a demand for individual freedom, for stronger rights of exit *for women too,* than for more equal forms of partnership within freely chosen relationships. The culture of individualism has a large role in this, all the more so because the alternative "anti-individualist" model, the idea of the social or welfare state, has been under such persistent attack.

The question I want to raise is whether the support and strengthening of the family, and of other forms of relationship and cooperation that depend on mutual identification, gift, and barter, is a proper object of public policy. Should democratic socialists in particular still have a commitment to this idea, on grounds related to their traditional antipathy to individualist market relations and coercive political relations, as dominant forms of social life? I want to argue that they should have, and that they can do so in ways that nevertheless defend an equal division of rights and powers between men and women.

Stein Ringen, in a recent pamphlet and book that are in part valuable, in part misguided, has pointed out that the family is a very important locus of production, as well as of more readily recognized consumption. The standard of living, or goods of life, that citizens enjoy are substantially generated or enhanced by labor performed in the home or by family members working for one another outside the home.* They clean, shop, cook, drive, mend, build, garden, nurse, and perform many other services for one another. Most commodities and machines are inert and useless objects unless labor is invested in creating value out of them. Ringen points out that cooperation between family members is a highly efficient way of increasing the value gained from such commodities or from the returns from labor in the market place. Cooking a meal for four does not take four times the work of cooking a meal for one. Two people do not need to occupy twice the living space of a single person in order to gain equivalent benefit from it. A garden maintained by one person can be enjoyed by many. A car can be driven by one person but may comfortably transport five. Ringen argues that the standard of living as measured by GNP grossly underestimates its real value because it does not include the value-added from the informal family or friendship economy.

He also deploys this argument to explain the dissatisfaction many feel at the failure of rising incomes (where they have them) to generate an increased sense of well-being. He argues that this is not because people do not understand their own interests or have unrealistic or greedy aspirations, but because the gains made at the level of monetary income are in reality often being paid for by real losses in the informal economy. Working a fifty-hour week generates more money, but it means there is less time available to produce "goods" in the informal sector—through the "work" of playing with the children, making a garden, coaching a local children's soccer team, or producing a play with an amateur theater company. One could add to this the work of conversation, or attending to the needs of other people, or educating oneself, too. The situation must be especially painful in the United States, where enforced workaholism—long working hours, short holidays—is reported to be more rife than in Europe, but the British position is certainly worsening for those with employment.

The schema of production and consumption, though they dominate our current view of the economy, are ideological constructions that mystify the real economic process. This schema makes work seem mainly a sacrifice that we undertake in order to earn the money to be able to consume the products of other people's work. But in reality, most consumption is merely the location of another labor process. The labor of consumption (cooking, gardening, travelling, home maintenance, child care) involves effort, and is by no means wholly painful, but its most significant feature is that it is undertaken in a context of gift and barter

*Stein Ringen, *The Family in Question* (*Demos,* 1998) and *Citizens, families and reform* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

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relationships, not of monetary exchange. And on the other side of the production/consumption divide, much work in the market has its intrinsic satisfactions, which are deeply missed by those who cannot enjoy them, for example the satisfactions derived from cooperation, mutual recognition, and the deployment of human capacities and energies. Those who rightly demand jobs as an output of economic policy are not merely asking for the means of generating income, but for the underpinnings of a whole way of life.

Ringen's argument is that just as it seems quite proper for society, through its elected governments, to support and sustain the formal economy (by providing infrastructure, an educated workforce, security, rules, insurance), so governments should also be prepared deliberately to support families as a site of production and as a generator of social and individual well-being. He argues that our present economy undervalues, or indeed entirely fails to recognize, the work that is done in these settings, and far from giving it support colludes with the interests of capital in undermining and draining it of human resources.

IF THE "opportunity costs" of bringing up a child or caring for an aged relative or friend are high, because of the superior rewards available from the market, then individuals will reduce their commitments to these tasks. If these activities are socially recognized and paid for (by child allowances, or allowances to support the care of the infirm), then individuals will make different decisions, not in every case but for the most part. The system of taxes and benefits, and of course the organization of labor and other markets, selectively rewards and sanctions different kinds of activity. Ringen's explanation of declining family size, and even more important of declining commitment to work within families, is that the opportunity costs of this work in contrast to paid work has changed in a way too favorable to the latter.

This has happened in part as a consequence of women's newly won freedom to enter the labor market and find gainful employment in it. The new freedom seems to be the effect of economic as well as political and cultural changes, as the growth of the service and information economies has reduced the comparative advantages men had in the preceding productive regimes of agriculture and industry. Opportunity costs have changed because women now have many choices, where formerly they had few. This is of course a positive development, and there should be no regression to the situation where choice was not available to them.

But the fact that work in the market is materially rewarded is not a good reason why work outside should not be. It should be possible to recognize many spheres of work in the informal sector, especially those involving care across generations, and to ensure that they are materially rewarded on a gender-neutral basis. This is what child allowances, paid maternity leave, allowances for the care of the disabled, set out to do. Paid holidays, educational leave, and even provisions for retirement come into this category, if one thinks of all of these, as one realistically should, as occasions for productive life-enhancing work in the non-monetary sector, as well as of relief from the regimes of work that are organized through the market.

One of the chief scandals of the Blair government in Britain has been the "welfare to work" legislation targeted at unemployed single mothers, which requires them to retrain or reenter the labor market as a condition for receiving benefits. This requirement was imposed irrespective of the age of their children, even though it is obvious that whereas children of four or five can be expected to spend time at school (and in the care of the state or other formal agencies) younger infants might well not do so, either by their own or their parents' preference. It is entirely reasonable to regard the time parents spend caring for such young children as no less a form of work than the time they might spend at the supermarket checkout counter or cooking school meals: it deserves just as much material reward. It is a paradox of the diminution of family responsibilities for the care of children or the old, on grounds of gender equality, that its outcome is that many women who might prefer to care for their own children or relatives in domestic settings end up caring for strangers in the em-

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ploy of the government or of private agencies. Individuals of both sexes should be free to choose what they do, but not in these conditions, which reward one choice, and penalize another.

As always, the advocacy of personal liberty can mask as well as represent real interests. Whose interest is served by the emergence of a situation in which people become incapable of preparing a good meal, but depend instead on ready-made meals purchased in supermarkets or bought from take-out restaurants? Well, on the one hand, there are the interests of busy women or men, who are spared the work of cooking and washing up and can spend their time in different ways, most likely, especially in workaholic America, at their places of employment. But on the other hand, we see the interests of the capitalists (who may include you and me), who invest in the supermarkets and take-out chains, and who need an attenuated domestic economy in order to create this new marketplace for their goods.

How far should the state intervene not materially but legally to support the formation and maintenance of families? Does it matter that fewer people marry, that divorce is in effect obtainable on demand, that individuals may easily shrug off any responsibility they might have for the support of their children or parents? Is there a justifiable way of giving legal and normative support to lasting relationships and obligations, while not improperly infringing individual freedoms?

The Thatcher government tried, disastrously, to enforce parental obligations for the upkeep of teenage children aged sixteen through eighteen by denying the latter unemployment benefits and making them materially dependent on their parents. This imposed severe strain on many families of the young unemployed, both materially and in the visible withdrawal of public assistance for the parental function. The increased incidence of homelessness among the young, so visible in city streets in Britain, was in part a consequence of this punitive and counter-productive attempt to enforce family solidarity. These are very complex issues. We have become so much captured by libertarian values, and so (rightly) suspicious of authoritarian moralism—one of New Labour's least likeable habits of mind—that it has become difficult to justify more solidaristic approaches in case they bring with them the coercion of individuals.

Ringen's solution is to regard marriages as binding contracts in which both partners and children have a legal and "democratic" stake—as if the family were a miniature republic. But this imports a conception of rational self-interest and contractual exchange into a sphere whose essence seems to be more open ended and unspecified so far as the precise shape of mutual gifts and obligations is concerned. Here, if anywhere, is a sphere where complex and not simple forms of equality should apply. Nor does resort by government to moral persuasion and re-education in family values seem a feasible or desirable remedy to the individualization brought about by the market. Some New Labour writers argue that the power of moral guidance is one of the chief levers available to modernizing governments, and this view is echoed in the speeches of Tony Blair. In this respect, however, New Labour seems to be latently authoritarian. It is moralistic in face of the symptoms of declining social solidarity, but blind to their prime causes in the deregulated markets that its main policy agendas support.

Perhaps the best way forward is to look to the state to provide support to family and other lasting relationships, not only through the financial incentives provided for individuals, but also in the resources that it can mobilize to sustain systems of social support. Most people probably prefer to maintain lasting ties to and responsibilities for family members and long-standing friends and neighbors if they can do so without unacceptable costs. The task for the state therefore is to keep these costs to individuals at an acceptable level, to provide services that are supportive and respectful of personal ties, and to organize mediatory arrangements that assist in the negotiation of difficulties, including the facilitation of "exit" where this is most appropriate or is deeply desired.

There are many ways in which this supportive conception has evolved as an enhancement of previously more impersonal and usurpatory social services. Encouragement of parents to stay with children in the hospital, hospices that encourage the presence of relatives, obstetric

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delivery rooms that welcome fathers, counseling services provided in circumstances of marital conflict, public-housing allocation policies that recognize the need for family members to remain near one another, encouragement of reflection concerning decisions about abortion, are all examples. A new conception of "Active Welfare" (the theme of a special issue of *Soundings* magazine, Spring 1998) needs to be worked out, in which priority is given to the enabling of participative and self-managed forms of welfare delivery.

It is hard to see how democratic socialists, properly critical of markets and capitalism as the dominant form of social relationship, and also of the state as an all-pervasive substitute for this, can neglect the sphere of the family, and of its informal cognates of friendship and voluntary association, as an essential dimension of the good society. This is especially the case if, as socialists, we are also sensitive to the natural and necessary emotional dimension of human lives.

Recognition of the place of the emotions in the ordering of social life is crucial to arguments about the relevance of the family to democratic socialism. The rationalism of the Enlightenment tradition, both in its liberal and Marxist versions, has tended to disregard the affective dimension of human existence. Consideration of what we really want from the family requires us to bring this back into the picture. It is a paradox of feminism that it deserves the main credit for reclaiming this area of experience as relevant to politics, while having also been highly critical of the institution that has hitherto been the primary location of intimate life—namely, the family. The development of a convincing socialist way of imagining our society depends on working through these dilemmas. ●

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American Environmentalism Confronts the Global Economy

Ken Conca

Anyone old enough to remember gas lines, Love Canal, or Three Mile Island will recall a time when the environmental movement focused mainly on domestic issues. To be sure, the idea of a fragile planet was always part of the logic of ecology. But the actual work of lobbying for clean air and water, defending endangered species, protecting wilderness, and challenging toxic polluters was mainly a local and national affair.

It was during the Reagan era that the biggest American environmental organizations discovered ecology without borders. The ozone hole and the loss of biodiversity spoke of damage on a truly planetary scale. Powerful global images—Amazonia in flames, toxic-laden garbage scows trolling international waters—took their place beside then-Secretary of the Interior James Watt as tools to fan public outrage and raise funds. Spike Lee's *Summer of Sam* was nothing compared to the drought-plagued summer of 1988, which focused attention on scary scientific projections of global warming and turned climate change into the granddad of all global threats.

Despite this experience, mainstream American environmentalism lacks a coherent stance toward the brave new world of economic globalism. Two decades of turbulent economic change have altered the international environmental agenda fundamentally, rearranging both the problems and the pressure points in ways that many of the big organizations seem not to grasp. Some progress has been made; campaigns organized around trade issues, multinational investment, and sustainable livelihoods are emerging alongside the traditional (and still important) focus on endangered species, public lands, watersheds, and wetlands. But when confronted with the challenge of neoliberal globalism, mainstream American environmentalism has had a disturbing tendency to split into competing camps of economistic liberalism and nativist rejectionism—both poorly suited for the new world economy we actually live in. These orthodoxies make it harder to build a progressive green response to economic globalism that is both meaningful and politically muscular. In order for the American brand of environmentalism to play an effective, responsible role in the response to globalism, some fundamental rethinking of the perils and opportunities in this changed world economy will be necessary.

The NAFTA Split

Most big American environmental organizations have domestic origins; they ventured seriously into the international fray only in the 1980s. Riding the wave of Reagan-inspired fundraising, groups like the Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, and Sierra Club began to join transnational campaigns on the hazardous waste trade, development financing, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and damage to the ozone layer. Some valuable lessons were learned in the process. The campaign to green the World Bank showed the leverage of international finance and the value of networking with local opposition groups around the planet. The violent deaths of activists Chico Mendes in the Amazon and Ken Saro Wiwa in Nigeria underscored the importance of basic political rights as a foundation for environmental activism.

But the fractious debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement exposed American environmentalism as out of touch with the changing agenda of environmentalism

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in a global economy. The deep split among the major organizations into pro- and anti-NAFTA camps did more than just neutralize the environment as an issue in the NAFTA debate. It showed that American environmentalists lacked anything close to a shared political-economic ideology. NAFTA also exposed environmentalists' unfamiliarity with the terrain of international political economy, as groups on both sides of the debate struggled to make sense of a landscape that included maquiladoras, foreign direct investment, and nontariff barriers as well as the more familiar forests, grasslands, and watersheds.

Several of the more conservative organizations—including the National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, World Wildlife Fund, Audubon Society, and Natural Resources Defense Council—were easily coopted into supporting the NAFTA negotiating process and the resulting agreement. They argued that a wealthier Mexico would purchase more environmental protection, apparently unaware of Latin America's history of worsening poverty marching in lockstep with rising national wealth. They spoke of making Mexico a model of third-world environmental policy, despite the extensive environmental legislation already on the books and the state's skill in coopting the Mexican green movement. They allowed environmental considerations to be shunted to a separate, vague, and largely advisory side agreement. In the end, they traded their support for promises of access and influence that never materialized.

Groups opposing NAFTA, including the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace, were not so easily duped. But having positioned itself over the years as a single-issue "environmental" lobby, environmentalism's liberal wing lacked strong ties to potential allies among labor and community organizations. As a result, NAFTA was a missed opportunity to galvanize a potentially potent red-green coalition. Worse, environmental liberals allowed themselves to be drawn into the fictional but decisive packaging of NAFTA as a "trade" agreement, rather than the more elaborate framework for the internationalization of production that it actually represented. They expended most of their energy pushing for greener trade rules, but failed to forge a consensus position on the core issues of capital mobility and the denationalization of public policy. Labor understood that NAFTA, by creating the constant threat of corporate relocation south of the border, would become a sword hanging over the head of efforts to increase wages—with repercussions far beyond the trading sectors of the economy. Environmentalists, focused more narrowly on the rules of the trading game, were slow to grasp that environmental regulations too could be targeted, post-NAFTA, as an unacceptable cost of doing business in America.

With the major organizations divided and operating on unfamiliar terrain, the environment was neutralized as an issue in the NAFTA debate. Environmental groups were relegated to the sidelines during NAFTA's critical endgame as Clinton, desperate to salvage the deal in Congress, feverishly distributed exemptions and special arrangements for everything, literally, from soup to nuts. Their paralysis was conceptual as well as political. In a world of economic globalization, the basic frame for the NAFTA debate—that it constituted a "free trade" agreement between sovereign nations—was as archaic as David Ricardo's nineteenth-century model of comparative advantage in English cloth and Portuguese wine. What should have been a united front in defense of national environmental regulations and a warning shot across the bow of hypermobile capital turned instead into a fractious internal debate and a missed political opportunity.

Fictions of Environmental Diplomacy

Nearly a decade later, little has changed. Perhaps feeling burned by NAFTA, the major environmental groups did forge a solid front to oppose giving the Clinton administration fast-track negotiating authority for further trade liberalization. But simple assumptions about economic competition and sovereign diplomacy continue to dominate their approach to transnational issues and globalization. The more conservative organizations in particular seem to have embraced a fantasy world of international environmental diplomacy. In this highly stylized world, sovereign governments—

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sharing a concern for global problems but unable to agree on the allocation of responsibility—engage in bargaining to distribute the costs of implementing sound environmental practices. Change is thought to come from elite influence—pressing governments to cooperate or, better yet, insinuating one's organization into an advisory position on the national delegation to the latest treaty talks or "conference of the parties." Organization Web sites provide glitzy reports from the front lines of global summitry, which often contain little more than general assurance for the donors back home that a crack team of hardworking experts is on the case.

THE DANGERS of this approach can be seen in the ongoing talks on global warming. In the wake of the vague commitments made at the 1992 Earth Summit, governments continue to haggle over the shape of a global climate agreement. The hot concept in the climate talks is the buying and selling of responsibility, referred to euphemistically as "cooperative mechanisms." The approach includes many different schemes that would let countries count emissions reductions outside their borders as part of their treaty obligations to reduce greenhouse gases. The basic idea is to reduce the emissions causing this "global" problem wherever it is most efficient (cheapest) to do so. Some versions would allow a country to meet some or all of its treaty obligations by purchasing another country's surplus emission reductions. This is said to promote global efficiency by exploiting the comparative advantage of some countries in emissions reductions. In other words, if Russia reduced emissions by more than its treaty obligations, it could sell the surplus reductions to the United States, creating an attractive new export commodity of emissions reductions. Other versions would allow credits for foreign investments that promote such reductions through, say, energy efficiency or fuel switching—thereby drawing investment to the places where the cheapest gains can be purchased. The world, it is said, will see the same benefit at lower cost when America can invest in, say, China's energy sector as opposed to electric utilities in the Ohio River Valley or its own rapidly growing fleet of sport-utility vehicles.

Similarities to other neoliberal ideas are obvious. So are the political parallels: at the 1997 Kyoto climate meeting, the Clinton administration made it clear that any international agreement gaining U.S. support would have to include an emissions-trading scheme. The debate has settled into arcane haggling over who could transfer which emissions reductions to whom, or whether past reductions should count against future obligations—underscoring how deeply the concept is embedded in the framework of the climate talks.

The major American environmental organizations active in the climate talks have taken different positions on the details of emissions-trading schemes. The most vocal advocate of emissions trading has been the Environmental Defense Fund, long the intellectual leader in the shift to free-market environmentalism. EDF sees these so-called "flexible" mechanisms as "important pathways to achieving the multiple objectives" of the climate agreement. Other organizations have been wary that the trading scheme will be poorly crafted or executed, thereby allowing rich countries simply to purchase credits overseas rather than setting their own economies on cleaner trajectories. The Natural Resources Defense Council has urged "substantial" domestic emissions reductions among the rich countries and warned about potential loopholes in trading mechanisms. The World Wildlife Fund, originally opposed to the complex trading schemes, swung around to accepting the idea of a "well-monitored" trading system. Post-Kyoto, WWF's position has been to warn against letting trading schemes be filled with loopholes. The fear is that rich countries might claim that their overseas investments were responsible for improvements that would have occurred anyway, or that governments will cash in recession-induced reductions rather than making needed investments in energy efficiency or cleaner technology. In other words, the more market-zealous environmentalists among the majors have run with the notion of buying and selling environmental responsibility, while the more cautious ones have merely walked with it—worrying as they stroll that foreign credits might be claimed for emissions reductions that never

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really happen or that would have happened anyway. Walking or running, they move in the same direction.

But the problems with tradable emissions are more fundamental than potential loopholes or double-counting. In much the same way that neoliberal thinking treats economic growth, trading schemes are based on the dangerously simplistic idea that emissions reduced anywhere are benefits realized everywhere. In fact, the location of emissions reductions, irrelevant in the neoliberal model, has enormous consequences in the real world. The flip side of "efficiency" in these schemes is unaccountability. Powerful, globally minded actors can buy a slice of pollution control wherever it happens to be cheapest at the moment, without regard for the impacts on the local communities whose environmental quality is thus being bartered. Worse, as individual communities are sacrificed in this manner, so is the effort to create a broadly progressive green movement. Buying progress on climate change in remote locations makes it easy to obscure back home that "separate" issues such as acid rain, local smog, chronic respiratory disease, and global climate change are intimately linked through the same polluting practices. Making these connections is the key to building a more broadly based and firmly grounded political movement for sustainable livelihoods, meaningful work, and livable communities. In contrast, allowing polluters to find abstractly "offsetting" savings in remote places undercuts the threat to prevailing structures and practices in favor of the same old single-issue tinkering, with public anxiety salved by accounting manipulations of the global green ledger.

Trading in emissions also obscures the locus of power in global production systems. For an ever-larger swath of the world economy, the central model is no longer the vertically integrated, production-driven multinationals of the post-World War II variety, whose power flowed from control of manufacturing. Instead, in industries ranging from auto parts and computer software to cut flowers and athletic footwear, power in the global production chain has shifted both upstream and downstream from the factory. Upstream lie the institutional investors and well-heeled global speculators who provide the capital (until a better opportunity comes along); downstream are the retailers, brand-name firms, and advertisers who add the hype-induced value to what otherwise would be just a toy, a shoe, a grape, or a spark plug. The classic example is Nike, which owns a set of marketing and advertising relationships, the public images of Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, and the iconic swoosh symbol—but not a single production facility. Instead, Nike relies on a "flexible" production system of shifting short-term contracts with third-world sweatshops. For Nike and others organized this way, control of the means of production flows from their leverage over an almost endless supply of potential suppliers and from their grip on marketing, retailing, and advertising at the consuming end of the commodity chain.

THESE NEW realities of power in a rapidly shifting global economy are barely hinted at in international climate diplomacy. The numbers on the table in global summitry say that a place called Malaysia is accountable for the greenhouse-gas emissions that go into making an American's Nike tennis shoes. Framing the problem this way does violence both to justice and to common sense: The upstream and downstream links in the global chain of sneaker production are absolved of responsibility, the Malaysian government is naively assumed to be able to control the global commodity chains that pass through its territory, and the solution to the problem is assumed to be found in the place that is the weakest link in the global chain of economic power. Missing are some basic truths of the global casino economy. On the supply side, those same shoes could be made three months hence in Indonesia, Vietnam, or the Philippines. On the demand side, the affluent consumers of those shoes are exporting the social and ecological costs of their production to places where those costs can be hidden from the global view.

The myths behind international environmental diplomacy are useful to global captains of industry, to governments strong and weak, and to more than a few nongovernmental organizations that play the game of diplomacy and consulting. But they offer little hope as the

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foundation for serious environmental protection. Genuinely cooperative mechanisms across national borders are critically important. But such mechanisms will work only when they tie together the production process, the financing mechanism, and the consuming interests ultimately served by production. If high-consumption societies were to trace the offshoring of their pollution back to its specific geographic locale and pay the price of environmental protection *in that location*—say through a pollution tax on imports that would be invested in environmental clean-up at the site of production—then we might have the foundation for something closer to a truly sustainable cooperative mechanism. An international pollution tax is not a panacea; it does not address the fact that communities from Bhopal to Chernobyl to Love Canal lack the power to choose the forms of production in their midst. But at least it would admit where power and responsibility lie, while bringing home some of the costs. This approach would require careful analysis of the ecological effects of production-for-trade, independent monitoring of corporate activity, and the transnational mobilization of political pressure at each link in the global commodity chain—exactly the roles shed by environmental organizations that become too vested in the diplomatic process. Instead, we are moving toward an abstract scheme that lets high-consumption societies buy or steal generic credits anywhere they choose, completely unlinked from their own responsibility.

Not all of the major organizations have accepted the political marketing of tradable emissions. Friends of the Earth has rejected the whole approach, stressing that the primary architects of the global economy should take the lead in reducing their own emissions. Greenpeace has also been opposed. But as with NAFTA, the willingness of several prominent organizations to sign on, mute their opposition, or tinker with the details provides invaluable green camouflage for neoliberal policies.

Green Border Guardians

If the climate case shows that economistic logic and misunderstandings of global political economy can draw environmentalists into dubious alliances, then the Sierra Club's recent brouhaha on immigration policy shows the opposite danger—the risk of a destructive, nominally green backlash against all things international. The controversy surrounded a ballot initiative for the Club's 1998 elections. Calling for a strong Club stand against U.S. population growth, a group of activists launched a ballot referendum that explicitly targeted immigration as well as domestic fertility. They were responding to a 1996 decision by the board of directors to avoid an explicitly anti-immigrant stand in the Club's official position on population issues. Alarmed by the political ramifications of targeting immigrants, the board of directors placed a counter- initiative on the ballot, calling for the Club to focus on underlying causes of global population growth and migration pressures rather than a symptom-driven attack on immigration policy. After a debate full of recrimination and accusations, the Club's national membership rejected the anti-immigrant initiative by a 60-40 margin and approved the board's take-no-position initiative.

Only 13.5 percent of the Club's more than half-a-million members voted. But the support of a full 40 percent of those who did vote illustrates the tricky politics involved in preventing a left-nationalist response to globalism from turning into a nativist, xenophobic backlash. Some support for the anti-immigration initiative was not grounded in environmental concerns at all, but came from right-wing anti-immigrant groups. And some seemed to be grounded in a narrow "not in my (national) backyard" mentality—let's preserve our lifestyle by closing the door behind us. But it would be dangerous to dismiss the initiative's support in these know-nothing terms. Many of the initiative's backers did present a global vision: they stressed the status of the United States as chief global polluter and the role of Americans' consumerist lifestyle in attaining that dubious distinction. They argued that immigrants were shedding more sustainable forms of living to join the ranks of the overconsumers on entering the United States. According to one leader of the initiative movement, "The world cannot afford any more North Americans."

The problem with this frame of reference is that it individualizes responsibility for the

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social structures of consumption. No effort is made to ask who the immigrants are, where they come from, how they lived previously, where and how they actually live in the United States, what cultural or political values they bring with them, or how they enter the streams and currents of American life. Instead, all American consumers are created equal. There is a clear response to globalism in this stance—but it is a response that refuses to differentiate in terms of race, class, gender, and power, preferring to hand out 270 million identical indictments.

An equally troubling aspect of the Sierra Club controversy was that opponents of the anti-immigration initiative sometimes flirted with a similarly undifferentiated view. Some simply argued that the population problem was globally additive and needed to be addressed in those terms rather than in terms of its distribution. A strong theme in Sierra Club public pronouncements after the balloting was that the way to address the "root" of the problem was to stop the U.S. Congress from meddling in third world family planning programs. In an op-ed rebuttal to Georgie Anne Geyer's fulminations about its timidity on the immigrant question, the Club's executive director Carl Pope wrote that "the crux of the problem is too many people, not their whereabouts. . . . Sierra Club members know that hiring more border guards or scapegoating immigrants for our country's gargantuan appetites won't help the environment. Erecting a Pat Buchanan-style fence wouldn't prevent toxics from crossing the Rio Grande or keep Tijuana's sewage off San Diego's beaches." To their credit, Pope and others did call attention during the debate to underlying economic structural adjustments as drivers of migration. They pointed to the impact of NAFTA on rural Mexican communities and the role of International Monetary Fund conditions imposed during the Asian financial crisis. But lapsing into a generic indictment of "too many people" risks the same undifferentiated view of the problem that spawned the anti-immigrant backlash in the first place. And to outsource the problem as one of Mexican toxics and Tijuana sewage is to ignore the reality of American overconsumption and flirt with scapegoating the world's poor.

To argue whether the problem is "too many people" or "too many Americans" is to ignore almost everything that has been learned about the complexities of both population growth and immigration in recent decades. A disturbingly wide swath of American environmentalism seems stuck in the three-decades-old, apocalyptic soundings of *The Population Bomb*, unable to differentiate the human species into its component social parts. A better approach to thinking about immigration was suggested by some opponents to the initiative, both inside and outside the Club, who stressed the need to place immigration in political and economic context. In an essay widely circulated by e-mail prior to the vote, Michael Dorsey used the example of Maryland to show that immigrant communities were playing a key role in sustainability by "resettling and revitalizing" neglected neighborhoods around Baltimore and Washington. Creating diverse communities in and near urban centers, renovating the existing stock of housing, bringing people closer to work, school, shopping, and recreation—these are key elements of any model of sustainability for today's overconsuming America. They are also practices that stand in marked contrast to the rampant suburbanization and sprawl of predominantly white and more affluent communities in the Washington and Baltimore suburbs, where few recent immigrants live. This example illustrates what the initiative's backers, and some of its opponents, chose to ignore—that analysis of population and immigration issues must begin with where and how people actually live, not with cartoonish notions of overconsuming Americans and desperate third worlders.

As the debate showed, the Sierra Club is far from monolithic. Emphasis during the debate on the need for political-economic analysis and multicultural coalition-building are hopeful signs of recognition that a globalizing world economy will require adjustments in strategy, tactics, and partnerships on a wide range of issues, including population growth. So too is the Sierra Club's growing activity on human rights issues, which could be a model for progressive coalition building among envi-

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ronmentalists. These might be the foundational elements for a stance on the world's population problem that started from a position of solidarity with people's lives rather than hostility for their offspring. But popular frames on both sides of the immigration debate showed the same steep learning curve on globalization seen in the climate debate and NAFTA.

A Better Response to Globalism

How then to craft a progressive green response to globalization? One critical element is a renewed vision of progressive international coalition building, across movement borders as well as national ones. The key sectors of the new world economy of flexible specialization include apparel, footwear, textiles, toys, produce, household products, and consumer nondurables in general, as well as large chunks of the burgeoning service and information-technology sectors. These industries are not familiar targets of environmental campaigns. They are increasingly central, however, to labor struggles over de-unionization, organizing, offshoring, and forced labor. And they could form the front lines of a new ecological agenda centered on toxics, pollution havens in free-trade zones, environmental health in the workplace, and the export of consumerism. The labor movement, environmentalists, human rights activists, and consumer groups in the United States have only occasionally found common cause. But the challenge of economic globalization creates new opportunities for potent partnerships.

Another promising avenue is a more direct confrontation with the problem of consumption and the demand side of economic globalism. Historically, the big American environmental organizations have downplayed problems of overconsumption and consumerism in their diagnoses of environmental ills. Instead of mounting a central challenge on growth, consumerism, and the consumption trap, they have pushed technological and regulatory controls that address these questions only obliquely. A classic example is the willingness to work with fast-food companies to improve their packaging or eliminate rainforest beef—but not to confront the role of Big Fast Food in the toxification of agriculture, the destruction of local food supply networks, sprawl, and the merchandising of culture. There are signs that the time is ripe for a more explicitly environmental focus on these issues.

At a time when environmental organizations are struggling to maintain their financial and (for those that have one) popular base, large and growing numbers of Americans express deep frustration with sprawl, gridlock, their inability to trade income for free time, and a generally eroding quality of life. These frustrations are urban as well as surburban, and resonate well beyond the middle class. Rather than galvanizing a systematic movement for change, however, much of this dissenting energy is dissipated through feel-good measures like recycling, the individualization of responsibility (ten steps YOU can take to stop global warming!), and a yearning for voluntary simplicity. Channeling this energy requires a more direct confrontation with the demand side of economic globalism, based on explicit resistance to the consumption trap that exposes its impact on work, time, community, health, and political power.

If environmentalism is to have that deeper meaning, environmentalists must move beyond some dangerous cartoons—images of a market that doles out nothing but efficiency, or a potentially sustainable fortress America that shuts out problems "over there." Shedding these dated notions and following power in a changing global economy to its source will be the key to a progressive green response to globalism, with or without mainstream American environmentalism. ●

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On Catholics and Democrats

In the Fall 1999 issue of Dissent, *Margaret O'Brien Steinfels argued that by making abortion a litmus test, the Democratic Party is alienating Catholic voters who should be its supporters. We asked several people to comment—*EDS.

E. J. Dionne, Jr.

THE STORY is told of Mrs. O'Reilly being taken to the polls on Election Day by her son. She has always voted Democratic. Her son, a member of the upper middle class, votes for lots of Republicans. He turns to his mother and asks her how she plans to cast her ballot.

"Straight Democratic," she says, predictably.

"You know, mother," the exasperated son replies, "if Jesus came back to earth and ran as a Republican, you'd vote against Him."

"Ah, hush!" Mrs. O'Reilly snaps back. "Why should He change His party after all these years?"

Mrs. O'Reilly would certainly understand the Catholic ethos Peggy Steinfels evoked with such eloquence, feeling, and thoughtfulness. But there are now many more Catholics like Mrs. O'Reilly's son than there used to be. Although white Catholics are still more Democratic than white Protestants, Catholic voting is now heavily conditioned by class (well-off Catholics are more Republican) and by region (southern and western Catholics are generally more Republican than Catholics in the northeast and Midwest). And, of course, Latino Catholics, a growing part of the Church, have their own distinctive patterns. Especially in California, they are moving strongly toward the Democrats, though Latino trends are as diverse as the Latino community itself.

It's worth noting that for all the frustration with Clinton that Steinfels describes, he has done unusually well for a Democrat among Catholic voters—not, to be sure, when compared with John F. Kennedy, but certainly when compared with other recent Democratic nominees. That suggests Clinton evokes something of the communitarian ethos that affects most Catholics, right, left, and center. And although Steinfels accurately describes Clinton's stand on abortion, it's also true that Clinton has made a point of painting the Democratic Party as less hostile to religion than some of his predecessors did. "Clinton's greatest legacy may well be his leadership in reducing the bigotry against religion that has been expressed in recent decades by much of the Democratic Party and American liberalism," Adam Meyerson, a vice president of the Heritage Foundation, said a couple of years ago. Meyerson paints other Democrats too harshly, but his underlying point about Clinton is valid enough.

I SHARE SOME of Steinfels's frustration with Clinton—especially with his decision to sign the welfare bill and his stand on the death penalty. (In truth, there are few politicians in either party prepared to argue against the death penalty. My hope comes from evidence that falling crime rates are making many Americans think twice about capital punishment. Perhaps it will become politically possible for the more courageous politicians to speak out again against it.)

She's also right in saying that making abortion a litmus test is a mistake for either party. The politics of litmus tests undermines the moral seriousness and difficulty of the issue. Most Americans, the polls suggest, are sensibly ambivalent about abortion. They are, for good reasons, uneasy with it morally. They are also uneasy with an outright ban, especially in the early weeks of pregnancy. It often seems easier for Republicans and conservatives than for Democrats, liberals, and people on the left to speak to this ambivalence. Isn't that a prob-

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lem for the left? My hunch is that as parts of the prolife movement attack their long-standing supporters for backing campaign finance reform, the politics of abortion may change. Progressives just might be forced to rethink their attitudes toward abortion opponents who agree with them on so many issues, even as prolife progressives challenge the partisanship visible in segments of the anti-abortion movement.

And I could not agree with her more that it would be a catastrophe if physician-assisted suicide were turned into another "prochoice" litmus test. At a moment when progressives are raising the right questions about managed care, do they really want to make it more likely that physicians will prescribe death as an alternative to more compassionate care toward those in pain? The intense doubts within the disabled community about physician-assisted suicide ought to give other progressives pause.

There is good reason to protest against a radical individualism that fails to see how personal liberty is best protected in a community that values social justice and honors the bonds of family and free association. That protest is at the core of Steinfels's argument and I suspect that most of the editors of this magazine—especially Michael Walzer, who has written so powerfully on these subjects—agree with her on this point at least.

But perhaps I'm less pessimistic than she is. My sense, from the pages of this very magazine, is that our politics are turning in a modestly communitarian direction. The left and center no longer wish to allow the right to enjoy a monopoly on Ronald Reagan's famous trinity of "family, work and neighborhood." But, for that monopoly to end, progressives will have to be more open to people such as Peggy Steinfels and to the arguments she's advancing. ●

E.J. Dionne, Jr. is a columnist for the *Washington Post*, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and author of *They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era.*

Peter Laarman

I am a person of faith and a lifelong left Democrat who disagrees profoundly with Margaret O'Brien Steinfels on the specific issue that tempts her to regard today's Democratic Party as "the party of death." In brief, I look at women, and especially poor women, as the key vulnerable constituency Democrats should continue to defend with respect to abortion; I am *not* as confident as Steinfels that women's legal right to choose is legally "here to stay"; and I certainly do not think that it's the job of Democratic officeholders to preach against abortion. Aren't there already plenty of people out there doing that? My own experience as a pastor tells me that pregnant women facing the momentous choice to seek abortion already feel a good deal of moral censure—from spouses, parents, and boyfriends, from a disapproving culture as a whole, and often from their religious communities. If they have come to see me it's because they know by reputation that my counsel won't *begin* with a condemnation of their irresponsibility or their promiscuity. These are indeed the main labels that a patriarchal culture still tries to pin on women who end up "inappropriately" pregnant.

Having said all this, I don't want to see people like Peggy Steinfels abandoning her "baptismal" party, and I worry about what becomes of a party that can't hold together despite sharp disagreements on issues like abortion. I am frankly delighted by the Republicans' current difficulty in trying to unite its Wall Street constituency, its religious-right activists, and its traditional small-town Rotarians; I am not amused when the same thing happens among the Democrats—for example, when good people like Steinfels say "I'm outta here" because they feel the party has failed some litmus test.

My own rage about the direction of the Democratic Party has to do with its uncritical embrace of the global corporate agenda despite the obvious and grievous harm that getting into bed with the masters of the universe wreaks on working people and on the earth itself. I am incensed beyond measure when I hear leading Democrats, including candidates Gore and

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Bradley, describe the corporate agenda—destruction of the public sector, deregulation of financial markets, and free trade—as the path to prosperity for everyone when they *know* that it's actually the path to greater riches for an elite that already has more wealth than it knows what it do with. I am also well aware that the "wealth primary"—the fact that two hundred thousand big donors actually get to choose party candidates these days—lies at the root of the Democrats' economic apostasy.

I think I have a right to be enraged about this situation, just as Peggy Steinfels has a right to be enraged about what she feels is the Democrats' cavalier dismissal of her qualms about abortion and physician-assisted suicide. The question is, what will we do with our rage?

I am willing to wager that if Steinfels were able to talk to Democrats in leadership positions within the party, she would discover a substantial number who share her qualms; I believe her interlocutors would say they do *not* feel mechanically beholden to NOW or to NARAL but they *do* feel conscience-bound to support the principle that the individual woman's moral judgment can and should be respected. At the end of the day, I expect that she would find a good bit more than a dime's worth of difference between the parties on most matters of compelling moral consequence to her. But even if she found just a thin dime's worth, I hope that she would hang in there and try to convert that dime into a quarter and then maybe into a whole dollar. A party that could once contain Eleanor Roosevelt liberals and Dixiecrat reactionaries for the sake of winning elections and reining in Wall Street ought to be capable of containing both Peggy Steinfels and me. ●

REVEREND PETER LAARMAN is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City.

Rosalind Petchesky

DEAR PEGGY,

Twenty-one years ago you were editor of the *Hastings Center Report* and I was a still youngish scholar and "socialist feminist" activist, spending the year as a resident fellow at the Center to research a book on abortion politics. I remember how you baffled me then with political contradictions that had no reference points in my own background. Having grown up Jewish in the Oklahoma Bible Belt and moved to New York in the sixties, I thought I had a pretty firm grasp on where left and right were located. But there you were—sharp-tongued and bright, with a disarming touch of whimsy; what we would have called "progressive" on many social issues, in the tradition of Catholic social democracy, yet clearly hostile to my feminist politics on abortion. Now I read your piece on "Catholics and the Democratic Party" and find myself no less baffled than I was back then. The divides in our ways of viewing the current political landscape seem just as deep today.

Yet there are also strong points of intersection. Your lively description of your Chicago neighborhood and your youth as "the niece of a Democratic precinct captain," so different from my experience, was thrilling to read—I wanted more. Your evocation of "civic engagement" resonated with all I had longed for as a young person and had to piece together in a much less nurturing social context. And I totally identified with your sense of "political homelessness" in a Democratic Party gone centrist, sold out to big money and neoliberal values. Yes, Bill Clinton has "Republicanized the Democratic agenda" and "legitimated and reinforced the Republican shredding of the New Deal/New Frontier social net" in a way I too abhor. Yes, I hold my nose when (and if) I go to the polls, and will do so again when forced to vote for Hillary over Rudy for the Senate. He, after all, has sabotaged our public university and commandeered the racist policing of our streets, while she's only soured my feminist dreams.

But there the resemblance ends, and I find myself taken aback by the blinders you still wear on the question of abortion and how they distort your vision on a whole range of other

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social and political issues as well. First, Peggy, can you really have been in this country the last few years to say "politics is no longer personal"? Where were you during Kenneth Starr's rampage and Monicagate? or Bob Dole's second career as publicist for Viagra? Of course, this is not the "personal politics" of your childhood—of taking neighbors to the hospital and getting the corner street lamp fixed—but a more grotesque version, filtered through television talk shows and a public ethos of *both* self-revelation and sexual inquisition. Now, you have to admit that the two parties have not played equivalent roles here. Don't you see that the Republican right wing has been in the vanguard of the push to sexualize national politics in a way that probably, if I know you at all, leaves you choking (so much that you manage to forget the whole thing)? More important, don't you see that this kind of moralism is directly akin to anti-abortion and anti-gay and lesbian crusades, funded and conducted by the same folks?

WELL, LET'S cut to the chase and address our differences on abortion. I do not agree (based on much clinical and survey data) that abortion is a "tragic" decision "for most women," but it is a hard one. For most women this is *not* because of deep-felt religious beliefs but because it calls into question their relationships and their ability to control their own bodies; *and* because anti-abortion forces have succeeded on the cultural front, even as they have failed on that of politics and legality, in saturating the abortion experience with danger, guilt, and shame. Let's take the second- and third-trimester abortions you seem particularly upset about. Leaving aside the fact that post-twenty-week abortions account for a minuscule proportion of all abortions (something like .3 percent), are you aware that one-third of these are among teenagers, who are 81 percent more likely to get late-term abortions than adults? And has it occurred to you that the main reason pregnant teenagers delay getting abortions is precisely fear about the parental consent and notification laws that you consider "at the margins" of abortion politics? Add to this the more general fear and shame induced by the rabidly vocal anti-abortion movement, and I am suggesting—with, I think, good epidemiological backing—that much of the responsibility for late-term abortions can be laid right back at the feet of anti-abortion groups.

I should just ignore your mean and unsubstantiated claim that feminists, or "prochoice" people, don't care about the numbers of abortions but only their "quality and accessibility." Who, after all, has spent more ink and energy on the necessary social conditions for abortion to be not only a real choice but a less necessary one? My reasons, of course, for wanting to see fewer abortions, particularly among very young women, are probably different from yours. As a feminist (and staunch nonbeliever in "fetal personhood") I'm not concerned about fetal survival but about women's self-determination and health. In my vision of a better world, like that of so many feminists before me, women of all ages and social situations would be able to enjoy their sexuality free from fear of pregnancy and with a clear sense of control over their decisions. In light of the epidemic of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases among young people, growing fastest among young women of color, effective use of barrier methods of contraception is a life-and-death matter. But also from the standpoint of developing stronger, more self-determined young women and girls, prevention is a far preferable strategy to intervention after the fact. So here, I suppose, our different ethics can lead us to a common goal: making abortions fewer if not "rare" (which you yourself agree is unlikely in the real world).

But what would it take, Peggy, to realize that goal? If we're honest and clear-sighted about the necessary *social conditions* for diminishing abortions, we come right back to the broad agenda of equality and social needs that you and I accuse mainstream Democrats of selling out. Suppose for a minute that every urban and rural area and school district in the country had comprehensive reproductive and sexual health services accessible to all people (including young men, and including adequate counseling and provision of condoms without stigma); that those services (and contraception) were fully covered by health insurance available to all; that young men and women (espe-

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cially those from working class, African-American, Latino, and immigrant families) knew they would be able to stay in school, get a good public education, and find decent jobs; that (maybe in part as a result of the latter) young men no longer abused young women with slurs like "slut" and "whore" (as I heard ad nauseam on the bus coming home the other day) for being sexual or dressing a certain way. Just put this scenario together, Peggy, and imagine what it might do to current abortion (and HIV infection) rates.

Yet, amazingly, in all your polemic against Clinton for reneging on the promise of "safe, legal and rare," you never once mention contraception, health insurance, or any other aspect of what I would take to be a social democratic and feminist approach to the abortion question. On the contrary, you shift gears midway through your essay to a kind of rhetoric—impugning "the on-demand regime"—that (like "partial-birth abortions") reeks of moral righteousness and is intended to repudiate and denigrate rather than offer a more humane social policy. You insinuate ("the way abortion functions in our society"—yes? so how does it function?) without giving evidence or reasoned argument. And you accuse the Democratic Party of wielding a "litmus test" without acknowledging that the Republican Party for years has been doing the same, pushed by its anti-abortion right wing; and indeed, so do you.

In the end, it's through the litmus test of abortion politics alone, and not the abandonment of a broad social vision, that you view, and condemn, "the future of the Democratic Party." Though you say you feel just as strongly about support of the death penalty (inherently racist in our system) and cuts in social welfare, your real preoccupation here is with "physician-assisted suicide"—an issue that affects a tiny percentage of the population, and mostly those who are able to pay for it (hardly the "poorest" and "most vulnerable"). And you go on to infer that feminist, pro-choice, and labor groups are likely to get on the "PAS" bandwagon, though as far as I can see none of them is especially interested in the matter. This may be a device, a diversionary tactic, to paint abortion access and reproductive rights generally with the tar of libertarianism. But what it actually does is divert you from your original—and, in my mind, far more expansive and democratic (small "d")—focus on a broad social justice agenda. This is sad, because it cuts away the ground upon which we might one day be able to speak to each other about ethics, politics, and how to challenge the directions of both parties. ●

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Katha Pollitt

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS longs for the days when the Democratic machine ruled Chicago, handing out jobs to her relatives and fixing the parking tickets of loyal (white) voters.

I wonder how many black Chicagoans see racism as just a regrettable sour note in Chicago's working-class New Deal symphony. I suppose it's natural for Steinfels to mourn the lost political privileges of her own religio-ethnic group, but what does a famously corrupt racial and ethnic spoils system—enforced, let's not forget, by staggering levels of police brutality—have to do with social justice or "the working class"—heavily minority, even in Steinfels's youth, not to mention today? Steinfels suggests that "Catholics"—by which she means the old European ethnics, not Latinos, who are about one quarter of today's Catholics and growing rapidly—are becoming disaffected from the Democratic Party, and that the party's support of abortion rights is the reason. Except for her own feelings and a passing reference to Samuel Freedman's *The Inheritance*, which profiles three right-wing activists, she provides no evidence for her claim. As she herself acknowledges, the majority of voting Catholics are still Democratic—interestingly, older Catholics, who are more likely to be strongly antichoice, are more likely to main-

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tain their affiliation than their younger, more prosperous, suburbanized children, who are squarely in the American mainstream and are more likely than their grandparents to be prochoice. The statistics and polling data I've seen do not support Steinfels's belief that abortion, much less assisted suicide, plays a significant role in these shifts. This is not surprising when you consider that most Catholics are not antichoice, and, indeed, have abortions at a slightly higher rate than other faiths. A 1996 CBS-*New York Times* poll found that only 9 percent of Catholics would refuse to vote for a candidate who differed with their views on abortion; in a 1994 poll, Catholics rated abortion 9th among eleven political priorities (for all voters, abortion ranked between eight and nine, which makes Catholics slightly more indifferent to abortion than the norm). Steinfels is attempting to mobilize a monolithic ethnic-urban sexually conservative "Catholic vote" that hasn't existed for decades—and that can no more be resuscitated than the five-cent subway token.

I WISH THE Democratic Party really had the staunch prochoice politics Peggy Steinfels thinks it does. It is simply not true that "no pro-life candidate will get party endorsement or campaign funds." Plenty of Democratic politicians have antichoice or mixed voting records: for the 1998 Senate, for example, the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League gave a prochoice ranking of 65 percent or less to Joseph Biden, Mary Landrieu, John Breaux, Daniel Moynihan, Ernest Hollings, Harry Reid, Robert Byrd, Tom Daschle, Tim Johnson, and Patrick Leahy. Over in the House, the congressional delegation from Steinfels's home state of Illinois includes William Lipinsky (12 percent), Jerry Costello (2 percent) and Glenn Poshard (24 percent), who ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1998 with full party (and AFL-CIO) backing. In all, I counted twenty-four Democratic representatives (all men, by the way) with NARAL ratings of 20 percent or less—that's 12 percent of the Democratic delegation. Far from mandating a commitment to abortion rights, in 1998 the party's official election strategy was to recruit conservative candidates—pro-gun, pro–death penalty, antichoice—to run against vulnerable Republicans. More recently, Michael Forbes (0 percent), the Republican Congressman from Long Island who switched parties (but not abortion positions) last summer, was energetically courted by Democratic bigwigs, including Representative Richard Gephardt (84 percent, up from 54 percent in 1997) and prochoice President Clinton himself.

Steinfels objects that Emily's List—an independent fundraising operation, not an arm of the party, by the way—insists its candidates be prochoice, as well as female. Why shouldn't it? Nothing prevents antichoice Democrats from setting up their own PAC. However, far from proving that the Democratic Party organization is monolithically prochoice, the very existence of Emily's List testifies to the spotty record of regular party funding sources in supporting prochoice (and female) candidates. If Emily's List has become an important player in the fundraising game it's not because the Party has an abortion-rights "litmus test." It's because thousands of Democratic women use Emily's List to make sure their dollars go for prochoice, female, at least faintly feminist candidates instead of the Glenn Poshards and the Michael Forbeses.

It's unfortunate that Steinfels does not seem aware of these widely reported developments. But then, she seems to think that the Democratic Party should cater to her views on abortion just because she has them. Believe me, if millions of Democrats, Catholic or not, felt as strongly as Steinfels does about restricting abortion, the party of Bill Clinton and (formerly antichoice) Al Gore would instantly respond. No one would accuse today's party fixers and rainmakers of an excess of ideological purity! To the extent that the Democratic Party remains prochoice, the reason must be that through the magic of focus groups and polls and Dick Morris-like triangulations, it has figured out that it will gain more votes, campaign workers, and contributions that way. When the calculations run the other way—as they do in many districts—the party is perfectly happy to trade abortion rights for a chance to win.

Steinfels presents herself as an abortion moderate, but the actual positions she es-

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pouses are anything but. She wants President Clinton to distinguish between good and bad reasons for abortion—an interesting philosophical question, perhaps, but one that could affect public policy only if *Roe v. Wade*, which expressly leaves the abortion decision to the pregnant woman in the first two trimesters, were overturned. If Steinfels accepts *Roe* as the law of the land, as she says she does, why blame the president for understanding what the law permits? Similarly, Steinfels supports Reagan-era funding cutoffs for international family-planning organizations that "promote abortion"—this is antichoice lingo for depriving Planned Parenthood and other groups of essential dollars unless they agree to a panoply of anti-abortion regulations, such as gag rules barring health workers from informing patients of their legal options and from engaging in lobbying for abortion rights. She never explains why the United States, a nation in which abortion is legal, should impose in other countries restrictions we reject for ourselves. One can only assume that she would like to see those restrictions here as well.

Similarly, Steinfels presents banning dilation and extraction abortions as a minor concession to justly outraged Catholic sensibilities. But the "partial birth abortion" debate is not really about, or just about, the very small number of late abortions performed by a particularly "offensive" method (is there a method she would approve of?). Most states, for example, *already* bar third-trimester abortions, by whatever method, except to preserve the life or health of the mother, as is permissible under *Roe v. Wade*.

The attempt to ban "partial birth" abortions is about two things. First, antichoicers want to get rid of the health exception—forcing women to carry to term even if the pregnancy will result in a dead anencephalic baby or in horrific, lasting, but non-certifiably-fatal damage—paralysis, sterility, accelerated disease. The lack of a health exception was why President Clinton vetoed the "partial birth" abortion bans passed by Congress in 1995 and 1997.

Second, the bans are typically worded vaguely, so as to cover a variety of methods performed much earlier in pregnancy. That—plus the little noted fact that the bans typically call for criminal prosecution of physicians—is why they are opposed by *all* the major relevant professional medical associations, have been repeatedly thrown out by state courts, and have been voted down in state referenda, most recently the one in Maine this past November.

You would never know from Steinfels's essay that abortion today is no "on-demand regime." In fact, the number of abortions performed annually has been going steadily downward. Abortion is increasingly hard to find, and, for poor women, increasingly hard to pay for. The Democratic Party is doing little to reverse this situation. Where are the Democratic politicians speaking out against Catholic-secular hospital mergers, which result in the loss not just of abortion services but access to birth control, in vitro fertilization, emergency contraception, and sterilization? Is a single Democratic politician fighting for the restoration of federal funds for poor women's abortions—abolished, let's not forget, by a Democratic president, Jimmy Carter? Who insists that medical schools that take federal funds teach students how to perform abortions (most don't) and that hospitals that take federal funds perform abortions as part of routine gynecological care? We are moving toward the very situation Steinfels wants: abortion is legal, but increasingly out of reach.

Behind Steinfels's essay—and perhaps also behind *Dissent's* interest in publishing it—is the "left-conservative" social-democratic dream of winning majoritarian support for New Deal-style social benefits by casting out the demons of sexual and cultural liberalism, racial equality, and feminism. Once again the "worker" would be cast as white and male ("men got jobs"); "family values" would shape public policy; "communities" would once again be run by the ward heeler, the union boss, the clergyman, the mayor who may be dishonest but who "delivers." In this scenario, the Democratic Party's most loyal constituents—feminists, gays, civil libertarians, blacks, liberals—are the problem and an imaginary bloc of "Catholic" or "white working-class" votes the solution. Somehow abortion always turns up as a major stumbling block to acquiring these new constituencies—

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never high taxes,"big government," the economy, the unbelievably corrupt and worker-hostile two-party system itself—things real working-class people complain about constantly. Why would-be progressive strategists insist on claiming as all but allies people who evince little or no interest in their program or values, while taking for granted their millions of loyal prochoice and feminist constituents is an interesting question. I suspect Steinfels is not the only one who misses Mayor Daley's authoritarian Chicago. ●

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Margaret O'Brien Steinfels Replies

SOME FOUR hundred people gathered recently to celebrate the social-justice work being done in the Archdiocese of Hartford. I was the after-dinner speaker. Looking over the sell-out crowd, I couldn't help but think of the childhood world I described in the fall issue of *Dissent*. These people too had probably been baptized Catholic and Democrat; they too had probably grown up in a thick culture of family, church, and community; maybe their fathers had been staunch union members. Most of these people are probably more prosperous than their parents and perhaps, as E.J. Dionne says, more likely to vote Republican. Still, as the evening's reports and awards emphasized, they had not forgotten where they came from—from families who were poor, often vulnerable, and frequently discriminated against. They run soup kitchens and shelters, they work on affordable housing and housing preservation, living-wage jobs, suburban sprawl, community development, debt forgiveness, and environmental justice. Yes, these were the mostly white, "old European ethnics," as Katha Pollitt styles them, but among the crowd were a contingent of Latinos and probably smaller groups of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

I don't know whether these people feel politically homeless—my personal lament—or not. But they manifestly care about the Democratic Party's lapses on welfare, housing subsidies, capital punishment, medical care coverage, and so on. And as Catholics, many probably feel *at least* as ambivalent about abortion as Dionne describes "most Americans"—"uneasy with it morally"; certainly some of them feel more strongly than that.

Let me enlarge my original point then: given the congruence of this group's social- justice interests with traditional Democratic Party issues and, indeed, with much of the left, why should they, or any of us, put up with the fact that abortion, not housing, not welfare, not health care, is *the* litmus test for the Democratic Party? Only E.J. Dionne agrees that "making abortion a litmus test is a mistake for either party." The other respondents implicitly or explicitly confirm not only that there is an abortion litmus test, but insist that there ought to be one.

This is a key point, one where a useful political discussion is possible and to Democrats, like me, urgent. Peter Laarman and Rosalind Petchesky deflect my argument by stating that *I* am the one insisting on an abortion litmus test; that is, even though I clearly support most of their social welfare and economic critiques, my qualms about abortion make me set those aside. Katha Pollitt claims that I want the Democratic Party to "cater" to my "anything but" moderate views on abortion and that Democratic politicians are actually a bunch of weak-kneed Nellies on the issue.

Well, naturally I would like the Democratic Party to agree with me about abortion, as about health insurance, capital punishment, redistribution of wealth and income, and all the other things on which my respondents needlessly lecture me. But my essay made it clear how much I was willing to co-exist as a minority in a party largely supportive of *Roe* v. *Wade* if there were some minimum acknowledgment of concerns like mine. So yes, I do have a litmus test, but it is precisely that there not be a Democratic Party litmus test.

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And there *is* a Democratic litmus test, certainly at the national level. *Pace* Katha Pollitt's distress that a full 12 percent of Democratic representatives received low grades in the prochoice ratings of NARAL (just think of it—12 percent!) and that the party was willing to recruit such candidates in districts where an equally anti-abortion Republican would otherwise win. Is it mere coincidence that Al Gore, Richard Gephardt, and Jesse Jackson all held, in varying degrees, reservations about abortion until they became potential national candidates? Do I have to quote the fund-raising letters and pseudo-surveys mailed out from the Democratic National Committee to show just how much the prochoice position is taken for granted as the mark of party faithfulness? As for the local level, in New York, city and state, when more-or-less liberal Democrats (the kind I would like to support) compete in primaries, they regularly strive to prove who has hewed most undeviatingly to the prochoice standard.

This operative litmus test deforms our political life while undermining our ability to organize around all of those economic and social issues that might reduce the conditions that lead at least some women to have abortions.

In fact, Roz Petchesky would like to see fewer abortions among very young women because she is concerned about "women's self-determination and health." Me too. When adolescents are sexually active, they should have contraceptives available. I agree. This may free "women of all ages and social situations . . . from fear of pregnancy" as she says, but does it give women, especially young ones, "a clear sense of control over their decisions [to be sexually active]"? I am skeptical. Does pregnancy prevention in itself assure self-determination and control? Does it build the kind of self-regard and self-esteem that we both agree are critical ingredients for young women in making their life choices about education, work, and family? In case no one's noticed, we no longer live in a sexually repressed culture. On the contrary, today's popular culture is sex-saturated and the lives of adolescent and pre-adolescents are radically affected by it. Is it possible that the self-determination of young women and girls (and young men as well) is better assured by helping them to resist the image in popular culture of women primarily as sexual, and as sexual objects, as well as the multiple pressures to premature sexual activity?

How does abortion function in our society? Petchesky challenges my underdeveloped thought; she suspects that I do not find the outcomes of abortion wholly benign. She is right. For one thing, it gives men license to have sex without taking responsibility for the consequences—whether that be a woman's hope for a loving relationship or her decision to carry a pregnancy to term or not. After all, *she* can always get an abortion. Any surprise then at the abusive language she and I both hear on the bus or on New York City streets? The larger point here: there are many unintended and unexamined consequences to unrestricted abortion and its intersection with a sexually permissive popular culture. Almost no credible social or medical scientists can examine the outcomes (or lack thereof) precisely because approval of abortion is a litmus test not only for the Democratic Party, but for the university research world and the major media as well.

As for Katha Pollitt: always bracing. Of course, I acknowledged the racial and sexist failure of the Daley machine, but she seems to think that politics is about the recycling of grievances and waxing indignant, not the broadening of the Democratic Party's appeal. The party may have its rogue prolifers, but I doubt that many readers will find her description of a beleaguered prochoice constituency within its ranks plausible. Yes, abortions are down, but for a variety of reasons. Among those reasons is, I believe, a small but growing sense of what is at stake in choosing abortion.

Yes, there are better and worse reasons for having an abortion. Presumably all the respondents would agree that coercing an abortion is bad; in fact, it is unconscionable. If we were to work our way backward from this, I doubt that Petchesky really thinks that all abortions are freely chosen. Don't poverty, lack of housing, abandonment compel some women to "choose" abortion? She and I have always agreed that in-

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sofar as social and economic conditions cause some women to seek abortions, then it is the responsibility of all of us to work to change those conditions. Indeed, I wonder how many of the women that Peter Laarman counsels feel that, at least in some measure, they have no choice but to "choose" an abortion.

FINALLY AND obviously, I agree with Dionne that abortion raises morally serious questions. Fetal life is human life. Our diverse traditions—including nonreligious ones—have varying views about when that human life should be protected. The closer to birth, the greater the level of protection—that view is reflected in legal restrictions on third-trimester abortions and in criminal convictions in the maiming or death of near-term babies. Orthodox Jewish tradition places such a high value on fetal life that only a threat to the mother's life—valued even more—justifies (indeed requires) abortion; less traditional forms of Judaism have extended this to the mother's health or well-being. Even so, that does not reduce the moral value of fetal life to nothing. My own church can be described as virtually absolutist on this question, believing as it does that an individual human life is present and to be protected from the moment of conception. That many Catholics do not share that exact understanding does not mean that we do not think that there are better and worse reasons in the decision to seek an abortion, and that some of those decisions will fail the test of moral seriousness. And they often fail, in the minds of many people, Catholics and others, precisely because they seem to be wholly dismissive of the value of the human fetus. How is it at a time that we are becoming more sensitive, and rightly so, to the protection of animal life and endangered species, we can treat the life that comes from our own bodies so indifferently?

I would never expect to convince Pollitt or Petchesky of these views, but I think I am raising questions worthy of serious intellectual and political scrutiny. We are barred from having these conversations precisely because the prochoice view is an absolute litmus test in those worlds—media, politics, and university—where we should be discussing them.

I also don't expect to convince Pollitt that I am not working to bring back a Chicago that never existed except in her imagination. Her closing apocalyptic nightmare of a patriarchal, racist tyranny sounds terrifying, but isn't it really consoling—at least rhetorically? It is much simpler to imagine a world so dramatically divided. On the one hand, the good guys: "feminists, gays, civil libertarians, blacks, liberals," and, oh yes, "real" working-class people. On the other hand, the bad guys: white male ward heelers, union bosses, clergy, corrupt mayors, "imaginary" working-class voting blocs, people who evince little or no interest in progressive values or programs, and nostalgic authoritarians like me.

If my essay did nothing else, I had hoped it would introduce a few questions about dichotomies like these. There are, after all, Republican gays, and blacks, and even feminists opposed to abortion, working-class people who care deeply about sexual, cultural, and religious issues as well as economic ones and who are "real," despite not meeting Pollitt's standards. And there are liberals, loyal liberals—in the case of those like me, Catholic liberals—who are being forced to the sidelines because of the Democrats' abortion litmus test.

Finally, Pollitt should be assured that no social democratic conspiracy lies behind my essay or *Dissent*'s decision to publish it. I would guess that several of the editors disagree with most of my piece and almost all of them with some of it. What I assume is at work here is an editorial policy that lives up to the magazine's name, for which I am grateful. ●

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Prime Time White House

Nicolaus Mills

THE DOCTORS of *E.R.*, the lawyers of *Ally McBeal*, the teenagers of *Dawson's Creek*. This year, as last, ensemble casts dominate television's leading programs. The newest ensemble cast is, however, different from the others. It consists of a fictional president and his White House staff, and it sets the tone for the most talked-about show of the fall season, *The West Wing*, the creation of Aaron Sorkin, whose past work includes the sitcom *Sports Night* as well as the screenplay for Rob Reiner's *The American President*.

Much harder to know is what to make of *The West Wing*, which in its Wednesday night premiere on NBC drew a whopping 16.9 million viewers. Political shows are scarce on prime time television. *Benson*, which ran on ABC from 1979 to 1986 and featured Robert Guillaume as the assistant to a state governor and finally as a lieutenant governor, defied the political odds during the Reagan years, but *Benson* rarely ventured beyond sitcom to take a serious position on any issue.

It is in film that politics have gotten their fullest attention in American pop culture. Yet here, too, the attention has usually lacked depth. Themes and moralizing have traditionally appeared in place of analysis. During the Great Depression Frank Capra in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and Preston Sturges in *The Great McGinty* made corruption their big issue rather than take on the New Deal question of how to get the country back to work. By the sixties Hollywood was focused on the bomb, and in 1963-1964 it took center stage in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. John Frankenheimer's *Seven Days in May* and Sidney Lumet's *Fail Safe*, which in combination offered audiences a new film genre—the nuclear thriller. Today, thanks to the Clinton scandals, sex has become the dominant political issue for Hollywood, and in Mike Nichols's *Primary Colors*, Ivan Reitman's *Dave*, and Barry Levinson's *Wag the Dog*, the fate of the nation is inseparable from the president's infidelity.

To its credit, *The West Wing* is far more complex than any of these Hollywood movies. If there is any film it resembles, it is Michael Ritchie's 1972 *The Candidate*, in which Robert Redford, in an exceptional picture brilliantly scripted by Jeremy Larner, played an idealistic California lawyer who wins a Senate seat only to find himself trapped by electoral politics.

The other side of *The West Wing* is, however, its implicit conviction that today the art of politics consists of making rapid decisions on the basis of a gut decency that substitutes for hard-won political values or serious thought. With its numerous plots, its fast pace, and cast of a half-dozen characters, *The West Wing* presents a White House that is centerless. The president, Josiah Bartlet, an independent-minded former New Hampshire governor played by Martin Sheen, is consistently seen reacting to events rather than being guided by an agenda or having a political philosophy.

The president and his staff thrive on franticness, and the message *The West Wing* consistently delivers is that it would be unsophisticated to believe that anything more deliberate is possible. To date, President Bartlet has shown himself capable of dealing with the religious right, anti-immigrant politicians, Middle Eastern terrorists, a Ryder Cup golf team he offended, and a gaffe by one of his own aides without ever worrying if he is being inconsistent or taking the country in the wrong direction.

In an America in which the Clinton administration has remained in power by virtue of its ability to zigzag, this centerless view of the White House is grounded in reality. What is frightening about *The West Wing* is its notion

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that such centerlessness is the best that we can do. The result is an endorsement not simply of the end of ideology but the end of ideas. For television that's an unsurprising endorsement. But in the case of *The West Wing*, it is a painful endorsement as well. The show has enough intelligence to tease us into expecting more. ●

NICOLAUS MILLS's most recent book is *The Triumph of Meanness: America's War Against Its Better Self*.

In Defense of Günter Grass

Jo-Ann Mort

IF TIMING is everything, one can imagine how pleased Günter Grass's publishers were to have the Nobel Prize for Literature announced during the Frankfurt Book Fair this past October, where Grass was an honored participant. But there was a greater significance to Grass's participation than the announcement of the award. For, in a profound way, Günter Grass's output—his literary career—helped make a German city a publishing and literary center by cleansing the German language of the Nazi stain.

After all, one of the casualties of the Holocaust was the German language. How could one use—or trust—the language or build a nation of literary worth after Hitler's book burnings and extermination camps? But today, Frankfurt stands as one of the most important, and one of the most cosmopolitan, literary centers in the world.

Grass, as part of what he terms "the Auschwitz generation—[belonging] "not as criminals, to be sure, but in the camp of the criminals," feels a strain no American writer would feel. Although each creative writer forms his or her work by reshaping language to a particular vision, the burden of using a language contaminated by the Nazis has been an ever-present burden for Grass and his comrades.

Indeed, he took Adorno's now famous dictum—that it was barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz—to mean something other than silence. "There is no end to writing after Auschwitz, no such promise can be made—unless the human race gives up on itself completely."

It is for his literary interventions—reclaiming the German language through the fantasies of his most famous character, Oskar, the thirteen-year-old boy from *The Tin Drum* who refuses to grow up, that Grass will be remembered.

But, for Grass, political activism and the chronicling of it is as important a component of his own legacy as his novels and poems. "A writer must face up to the test of reality; and that can't be done if he keeps his distance," he wrote against his critics who said that the literary life and politics don't mix.

His political activism—and his very clear commitment to democratic socialism—caused shrill attacks against him in the American press when he won the Nobel Prize. Most notably, Grass was accused by Jacob Heilbrunn in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece of a "nostalgia for East Germany" and castigated as a "leftist dinosaur." On the *New York Times* op-ed page, James Atlas took up the same cause: during a literary panel, Grass had challenged Saul Bellow about the ability of American capitalism to grapple with poverty and economic inequalities. Atlas put this forward as proof of Grass's leftist (read communist) sentiments.

Heilbrunn's chastising remarks about Grass's "illusions about communism" are ridiculous if one reads or listens to Grass. Even his fears about reunification were not unrealistic. His fear of a unified Germany as a military power has not been justified by events. But his concern about economic inequality in the two former Germanys was prescient. Divisions between the

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rich West and the poor East have led to serious problems in the new republic and are the cause, in part, of the current social democratic decline, especially in the poorer, resentful East, where the Social Democratic Party (SPD) continues to slip and the former German Communist Party (PDS) continues to rise.

Heilbrunn asks, who won the cold war? And guess what? Ronald Reagan's military buildup is once more hailed as the reason for the collapse of the evil empire, judged positively against Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, whose embrace by Grass earned him the American pundit's wrath.

No doubt Grass would enjoy being associated with Brandt and attacked along with his hero. But Brandt's and Grass's commitment to democracy does not need to be justified. The attacks on Grass remind us that the United States remains a parochial country, its pundits still fighting the cold war long after the Soviet Union has dissolved into tribal warfare, still unable to fathom the subtleties of social democratic politics.

True, Grass challenged American imperialism in our own backyard, joining with the majority of social democratic parties in Europe and many American leftists in defending Sandinista Nicaragua and Castro's Cuba, and he (and they) took much too soft a line on democratic rights. But he never defended communism. His article on Cuba in *Dissent* ("Pity on Cuba," Fall 1993) criticizes elections where "nothing like a recognizable opposition was allowed to present itself to the voters." Earlier on, his "excessive" defense of these regimes was focused mostly on the argument that American policy had driven them into the arms of the Soviet Union—not an unreasonable claim, and one broadly supported on the democratic left, especially in Europe.

Ironically, while he has been vilified in the United States as a leftist, in left-wing circles in Europe and once upon a time, among the New Left in the States, he was criticized as a cheerleader for incremental change instead of one-stop revolution. Grass states clearly: "I am a Social Democrat because to my mind socialism is worthless without democracy and because an unsocial democracy is no democracy at all. A bone-dry, inflexible sentence. Nothing to cheer about. Nothing to dilate your pupils. Accordingly, I expect only partial achievements. I have nothing better to offer, though I know of better things and wish I had them."

It would behoove Grass's critics to reread his gem of a book *From the Diary of a Snail*. Grass wrote this journal-type book during the election campaign in 1969 when Willy Brandt and the SPD won election in the Federal German Republic for the first time since World War II. It not only chronicles Brandt's rise to leadership, but clearly shows how, for Grass, contemporary Germany is inextricably bound up with the Holocaust and with the need to rebuild democracy in its aftermath.

In *From the Diary of a Snail*, Grass describes his travels around West Germany while speechwriting for Brandt. Grass attempts to explain the landscape of twentieth-century Germany to his two young children, moving back and forth among the remnants of the past to explain the present. He begins his story in Danzig, the city where *The Tin Drum* is set, and the city of his own birth. Most chilling in his telling are the questions his own children ask him when they listen to the story of the Jews' expulsion from Danzig by the Nazis. After recounting to his children the experience of the convoy of children who went on the "kinder-transport" to England, leaving their parents for safety, his children ask: "Did they have to go to school, too? Did they all learn English quick? And what about their parents? Where did they go?"

Throughout the book, Grass is lyrically accompanied by a snail—"The snail is progress," he explains, and it is the perfect construct for Grass's incremental social democratic climb. His snail has seen decades of struggle, from Bebel to Bernstein to Brandt.

Today, with heroes like Brandt long gone and with communism and revolution having fallen away, Grass's snail is still on the move. In the new millennium, we will discover if social democracy can indeed create a decent society. Can it equalize a global order, with capitalist America at the helm? This pressing question puts Grass's concerns front and center. ●

JO-ANN MORT, a member of the *Dissent* editorial board, writes frequently about issues of Jewish concern.

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Simone Plastrik 1919-1999

On October 28, Simone Plastrik, a founder of this magazine and its business manager, died in her home. Her contributions to our work were many and most often unsung. We print here some reflections and remembrances of her life. Mark Levinson's and Maxine Phillips's remarks are adapted from those made at the Dissent *editorial board meeting on November 6. Michael Walzer and Brian Morton spoke on behalf of the magazine at her memorial service.*
—EDS.

Mark Levinson

ONE OF THE most important people to this magazine, Simone Plastrik, never appeared in its pages as a writer. In fact, when I think about *Dissent*, I think about Simone. This is not only because of the role Simone played as business manager for the last eighteen years, or because when I first came around the magazine twenty-two years ago the editorial board meetings were in her living room, or because the office was in her apartment, although all of these things are part of it.

In my last conversation with Simone she announced she was dying. She wanted no more treatment. We spoke about many things—our families, our mutual friends, and the future of *Dissent*. But one of the last things she said to me was that she lived her life as a socialist.

The way she lived embodies what *Dissent* is, or should be, about. Let me say about Simone what Irving said about her husband, Stanley, at the time of his death eighteen years ago, because it applies equally to Simone:

> The idea of socialism may have become increasingly problematical, but the rightness of *being* a socialist had remained clear. And to be one meant to be like Simone, meant to stand fast in good times or bad; meant to be on call for whatever task was needed; meant to live by a code, largely unspoken yet not to be violated, of concern for the lives of men and women. Those of us near Simone never had to talk about the moral basis of *anything*, since we felt through her its constant warming presence.

For those who have been around the *Dissent* office, who can forget how Simone worked, tallying long columns of numbers with paper and pencil? When I first started working at *Dissent*, we did not have computers or even an adding machine. If the numbers were off by a few cents, she would start all over again with simple paper and pencil. There were times when she pored over those numbers late into the evening. I used to tell her, "Simone, it's only a few cents! No one will care. The IRS has bigger things to worry about." But no, it had to be done absolutely correctly. And it always was.

Simone was a taskmaster at the office. She made sure the work got done. When I worked at *Dissent*, one of the things I used to look forward to was when [executive editor] Manny Geltman would come to the office. Manny loved to talk and tell stories. Trotsky, Shachtman, the Lovestonites, the Goldmanites, the origin of the term "bureaucratic collectivism," the early years of *Dissent*, Meyer Schapiro and on and on. I loved it and it drove Simone crazy. I once overheard Simone and Irving arguing in the other room. Simone was telling Irving that when Manny was in the office I never got any work done. Irving insisted that we be there together. "The kid might learn something," he said. Simone laughed and relented.

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She only insisted that "the kid" learn and work at the same time.

Eighteen years ago, shortly after the unexpected death of Stanley Plastrik, I received a call from Irving. He was devastated by his friend's death. He asked if I was interested in helping *Dissent*. I said I would. He suggested that I come to the Plastriks' apartment the next day to meet with him and Simone. I will never forget this meeting. The only person more shattered than Irving about Stanley's death was Simone. We sat there. No one spoke. Finally, Irving said he wasn't sure *Dissent* could continue. For almost thirty years Stanley had been his closest friend and collaborator in putting out *Dissent*. He couldn't imagine doing it without him. "We are getting old," he said, "maybe we'll put out a few more issues and call it quits." He left the room. Simone, who hadn't said anything up to that point, looked at me and said, "Irving talks nonsense. *Dissent* will continue. We need your help."

If we are true to what Simone stood for, *Dissent* will also continue now. But it won't be easy. And we will need your help. ●

MARK LEVINSON is the chief economist at the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).

Nicolaus Mills

THE LAST TIME I saw Simone in the hospital, she had developed an infection as a result of her cancer treatment, and so for the entire length of my visit, I wore a surgical mask. The mask, which kept slipping under my nose and made me feel as if I were doing a bad imitation of the doctors on *M*A*S*H,* did not hinder conversation, however. Simone and I talked about *Dissent*, her grandchildren, the woman I am seeing, French politics, and Irving Howe's love affair with baseball.

It was clear now that Simone was not going to beat the cancer she had been struggling with, but it did not occur to either of us that this was a time for summing up or for my telling her what she meant to me. A third party watching from the corridor might have seen this as escapism, but Simone, I believe, would have found solemn conversation at this moment anathema. She would have viewed it as a betrayal of implicitness, a death-bed loss of nerve.

For Simone, life and socialism were inseparable. But the values that made her believe socialism was necessary were not just rooted in her commitment to justice. They came from a passionate sense of everyday life. To feel the joy of the ordinary was for Simone to realize the need for sharing that joy, for making it as accessible as possible, and so for her, socialism was in the deepest sense something she breathed and cooked and broke into pieces of conversation. For her, there was never a reason to stop and sum up.

A week later I saw Simone at her apartment for the final time. She had ended her cancer treatment by now, and she was very weak. But as in the hospital, our conversation roamed far and wide. It was still daylight savings time, but I stayed until the fall sky over the Hudson turned gray and Simone became sleepy. Then I tip-toed out of her bedroom, whispering a goodbye I am not sure she ever heard. From the doorway, her breathing was too faint to detect, but there was no mistaking her calm. It was the calm of someone who knew how much her life had mattered, who hated the idea of dying without ever fearing death itself. ●

NICOLAUS MILLS's most recent book is *The Triumph of Meanness: America's War Against Its Better Self*.

Contributions to the Simone Plastrik Memorial Fund for *Dissent* may be sent to F.S.I.S.I., 521 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700, New York, N.Y. 10017 and are tax-deductible.

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Brian Morton

SIMONE PLASTRIK was listed on *Dissent*'s masthead as its business manager, but she was much more than that. Irving Howe used to say that Simone was the one person who might be truly indispensable to the magazine. She kept the rest of us moving; to use the word she would have chosen, she kept us mobilized.

* * *

"I'm a woman of action," she used to say. When I came to work at *Dissent*, in 1983, the first thing that struck me about her was her insistence on getting things done without delay. Once when I was on jury duty I called the office at the end of the day to check in; Simone said she needed me to come up and take care of some urgent business. It was late; I was tired; I didn't want to; but I couldn't say no to Simone. I came to the office, and it turned out that she needed me to write a letter of apology to a subscriber whose issue had gone astray in the mail. Of course it could have waited, but that wasn't Simone's way. I typed the letter and put it in an envelope. "I'm so relieved," Simone said.

* * *

Writing to the subscriber immediately; answering the phone message on the same day you received it—she believed in the absolute importance of taking care of the small things. These small things—the minor details that weren't minor at all—Simone called *schmates*. About once a week I would feel her hovering at my shoulder. "Brian, have you taken care of all your *schmates*?" At lunch one day, just to joke around, I said, "Simone, I don't know what makes you tick." She looked up at me, surprised. "*Schmates*," she said.

There was a moral element in her attention to the small things. She had no patience for leftists who wanted to be generals. Her highest compliment was to call someone a worker—by which she meant someone who was willing to lick envelopes. The most withering epithet in her vocabulary was "prima donna."

* * *

We were lucky enough to know her only because of an accident. When she was a girl, growing up in Poland, she was a tomboy; she used to push the boys off benches. One day when she was climbing a tree, she fell to the ground and broke her leg. The fracture was so complicated that it couldn't be treated properly in Poland, and her father took her to a specialist in France. Her father liked it there and brought the rest of the immediate family. The extended family—all of them—died in the camps.

During the war, in Vichy France, Simone was in the Resistance. She never told us much about the risks she took; she preferred to tell a different kind of story. She would talk, for example, about how she'd painstakingly transformed her appearance in order to evade the police; she dyed her hair, wore dark glasses, and hid under an enormous hat. The first time she went out in her disguise, an old friend who didn't know she was underground came up to her, smiling brightly. "*Bonjour, Simone!*" he called out.

* * *

She joined the socialist movement at about the age of fifteen, as a member of the Red Falcons in Paris during the 1930s. Politically, she never lost her fire. In recent years she sometimes grumbled that Dissent had become "too social democratic—too *shvach*." But no one who knew her will be surprised to learn that she was thinking about *Dissent*, worrying about *Dissent*, to the last. Three weeks before she died, after she'd been confined to her bed, she told us that she'd had a dream that *Dissent* had received a hundred dollars from Vanessa Redgrave, who wanted to get involved with the magazine, and that Paul Berman had been dispatched to England to meet her and find out whether she'd matured enough politically to work with us.

* * *

I met her two years after Stanley died; through her stories about him I felt as if I came to know him. She talked about him as if he'd just left the room.

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She liked to talk about how Stanley and Trotsky—"the Old Man"—had engaged in a polemic in the 1930s, and how Trotsky had referred to Stanley as "the petit bourgeois from Brooklyn." To be insulted by Trotsky was a high honor.

About five years ago, we were gossiping about one of her friends, also a widow, who had a new man in her life. I asked her if she ever thought about finding a new man. "Why should I?" she said. "I'm too old. I'd have nothing to give him but my arthritis." Really, though, I don't think that was the reason. I think she was still married to Stanley.

* * *

Simone had fought back from illnesses so many times that it was easy to think she'd keep fighting back forever. Her arthritis was so crippling that she had to retire early from her job teaching French at the High School of Music and Art—a job she loved—and she was often in such physical agony that she couldn't sleep at night. During the last three years, after she was diagnosed with lymphoma, she spent almost as much time in the hospital as she spent at home. But I hardly ever heard her complain. She'd mention her discomfort, but matter-of-factly. I've never known anyone else who endured pain with such grace.

* * *

A few years ago, when she was very sick and thought she didn't have much time, she called up some of her friends to thank them and tell them she loved them. That was just like Simone. She didn't want to leave anything undone.

* * *

She had a gift for friendship. There was a small army of people who loved her—people who ranged in age from their twenties to their nineties. Every time she opened the mail, it seemed, there was some present or card from someone who'd been thinking of her. "I don't know why they're so good to me," she would say.

How could you not be good to Simone? Her liveliness, her loyalty, her cheerfulness in the face of physical suffering, her distaste for pretentiousness, her fearlessness, her amazing modesty—knowing Simone, you wanted to try to be as good as she was.

Once when I saw her in the hospital last May, she said she was planning to have a talk with her doctor. "I want to know how much time I have left—six months, two months, one month—so I can know how to organize myself. I want to make sure that everything at *Dissent* goes smoothly when I'm gone." She paused and said, "What do you think?"

I said, "I think you're extraordinary."

She waved me away impatiently. "It's not extraordinary," she said. "It's normal."

Normal for you, Simone.

* * *

She made a strong impression, even on people who barely knew her.

I was at her house once when she started to feel a terrible mounting pain in her side, from what turned out to be a blood clot on her lung. She calmly called 911, packed a bag, and put some make-up on while she waited for the ambulance. After a few minutes, two emergency medical service workers and two police officers arrived. They were with her in her bedroom for a while, checking her out; I was in the other room. After the EMS workers took her out on a gurney, one of the cops came up to me. He shook his head with something like amazement. "Your mother," he said, "is one tough lady."

I didn't bother to correct him about what she was to me. I just told him that I knew, I knew what he meant. ●

BRIAN MORTON is the author of *Starting Out in the Evening*.

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Maxine Phillips

WHENEVER THE conversation around the *Dissent* lunch table would go on too long or get too heated over some non-political matter (Should we put in another phone line for the fax? What color should the next cover be?), Simone would say, "Don't exaggerate!" and the discussion was over. The phrase was a direct translation from the French and meant "Don't make a big thing out of this. We have work to do."

As I try to put on paper what knowing Simone meant to me, I can hear her voice: "Don't exaggerate!" She was of the old school, the ones who didn't dwell on grief, who moved on to the task at hand. But I don't want to move on. I want to "exaggerate," because I know I will never have another friend like her or a comrade of her equal.

She was intimidating on our first encounter: brusque, no-nonsense. I knew she'd been a French teacher and her demeanor merged with not-so-pleasant memories of my own high school French teacher. Soon enough, however, we were sipping cafés au lait in her apartment early on Thursday mornings in front of a French book-talk show called *Apostrophes*. I was delighted to be with a fluent speaker whose patience and knowledge pushed me to a higher level of fluency. Who knew, I told my friends, that working for *Dissent* would turn out to improve my French, help me re-organize and redecorate my apartment, and lead to a wardrobe makeover? She never minced words. "Stop wearing those *schmates*." "Here's the phone number of a good hair cutter. You need it."

"How can you stand it?" my friends asked. "She's not my mother," I would laugh, knowing that if she were, no amount of common sense and good taste on her part would have allowed the messages to get through. At her memorial service Deborah Meier spoke of the parenting she provided all her friends, no matter what their age. Rarely in our adult lives do we find another adult who looks at us and accepts us as we are but sees what we could be and commits herself to helping us. Simone worked hard at being a friend. Of course she made it look easy. I wondered if the time she spent tending to friendships was possible because her family was grown, but it was clear that she cultivated friends from her youth. Through all the splits in the socialist movement she stayed faithful to her friends. Some may have moved to the right, some may have wavered in their commitment, but she never gave up on them.

Nor did she give up on her politics. Simone was born into a world and a culture that no longer exist. Her parents were bundists and she joined the socialist youth group, the Red Falcons, as a teenager. "You don't have that culture," she would lament as she recalled socialist summer camps and excursions. "You know how to put the social into socialist," we joked, and she would smile as she described the parties and the camaraderie. Our only contact with such events now was the annual *Dissent* holiday party, a pleasant enough affair, but, she asserted, not on a par with those of earlier days or of her youth. Still, she would be the first one there, the last to leave, making sure the wine was plentiful, the hors d'oeuvres were passed, the conversation flowing. Always, there would be a circle around her: the newest intern in the office, a friend from forty years back, a former student.

In June, when it looked as if she might not make it, she said, "I'm ready to die, but my children aren't ready for me to die." None of us was prepared, although we certainly knew it would happen. Her passing is symbolic, for she was the last of *Dissent*'s founding generation in New York. And it is searing and personal. We're on our own. Her apartment housed the magazine for the length of its existence; now, literally and figuratively, we have to leave home.

A new beginning for an enduring passion. No regrets. No "exaggeration." Thank you, Simone. ●

MAXINE PHILLIPS is managing editor of *Dissent*.

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Michael Walzer

All of us who knew Simone knew for months that she was dying. But this was still very hard to believe or accept. I have never so successfully repressed what I knew. It was simply impossible to imagine *Dissent* without Simone, our small world without her at its center.

She was a woman of valor, *eshet hayil*. No one will doubt that, but what I especially loved about her was that she was a woman of valor who pinched pennies. It was that combination that kept *Dissent* alive for so long—far beyond the normal run of a leftist magazine. She understood that in the real world socialist commitment had to be seconded by bourgeois virtue. I am not sure that she would have liked hearing this, but she was the near-perfect embodiment of both.

She was a militant. Today that word conjures up pictures of people with their fists in the air—and that's not a picture of Simone. Maybe she marched with her fist in the air in Paris in the 1930s. I think it's more likely that she organized the march and made sure that everyone got there on time and, afterward, collected some money for the movement. She was a militant who did not believe in gaudy gestures but in steady work.

She kept track of us—not only of our books but also of our conduct. I come into New York only one day a week for *Dissent*, and it's not enough. Every once in a while she would look at me and say, "I have to talk to you." That would be a signal to the others to move away, and then she would tell me what I had been doing wrong—mostly, what I hadn't been doing: the letters I hadn't written, the people I had neglected, the key moments, the opportunities when contributions could have been solicited, money asked for, that I had inexcusably missed. She did the same, I think, for everyone in the office. She was one of us; she approved of us; but she watched out for our mistakes. I thought of it as the higher bookkeeping. I can't tell you what comfort it gave me to see her sitting there, steadfast through all the years of pain and illness, going through the mail, recording and acknowledging gifts to the magazine, writing checks, filling the large ledgers in which she inscribed our financial life—and always keeping track.

Her home and our office were the same place, for more than forty years. On the day each week when Mitchell and I came in, we would all eat together, the small group of us responsible for the day-to-day running of the magazine. It was, naturally, a brown-bag lunch, signaled by Simone, when she thought a good morning's work had been done: *à table*, she would say. And she signaled again when lunch was over, simply by getting up herself; for although she enjoyed the relaxed conversation at the table, she never forgot that the hours were precious; some of them were actually being paid for. And there was more work to do.

The twentieth century has been hard on political certainties, and to have sustained a life of conviction and engagement in this time is a rare achievement. Simone succeeded because she was so focused, on this magazine, on these people. She knew what she believed about all the larger issues, but she also knew that we can express and advance these beliefs only on a local scale, here and now; and her here and now was *Dissent*. When Irving Howe died, there were moments when I thought that, well, magazines also have a life span, a time to flourish and a time to die, and maybe *Dissent*'s flourishing was over. But Simone did not believe that. She looked at the group of us who gathered in her home, and she decided that we could manage the work; we could carry on. She was sure that we should carry on. And she simply assumed that we would carry on. And so we did. And so we will. Not for her sake; she would not have wanted that; a political magazine needs a political reason; but with the strength that she gave us. ●

Michael Walzer is the co-editor of *Dissent*.

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The Great Transformation

Horst Brand

"SOME BOOKS refuse to go away. They get shot out of the water but surface again and remain afloat," Charles Kindleberger, the economic historian, wrote about Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* twenty-five years ago. The book had appeared thirty years earlier, and is still referenced in bibliographies of works published today. Barry Eichengreen's *Globalizing Capital*, indispensable for studying recent financial crises, appears to have been strongly influenced by Polanyi's ideas. What is it that sustains the relevance of this book?

Karl Polanyi, a Christian socialist, refugee from fascist persecution in the Vienna of 1934, wrote his book in the early 1940s, in the United Kingdom and the United States. It was a time when government intervention had by and large ended the Great Depression, when the political and social status of business had reached its nadir, and when war had been initiated by Germany and Japan, whose fascist or militarist rulers had been brought to power largely as a result of the preceding economic catastrophe.

Polanyi viewed these developments as denoting the end of an era that had begun late in the eighteenth century—an era marked by the triumph of the self-regulating market; its progressive constriction during the last quarter of the nineteenth century; and its demise during the first third of the twentieth. He argued that the social and economic conflicts of that era, and the depression and war that ended it, arose from the incompatibility of the self-regulating market with society's effort to protect itself against the ravages that market inflicted upon labor and land. The self-regulating market—self-regulating in terms of the principles of economic theory as well as of governmental laissez-faire—reduced labor and land to commodities, salable by definition at whatever price they would fetch. It was oblivious to the web of culture and institutions that embedded them in society. The worker, subjected to the labor market, was now separated from his social integuments, his moral stature undermined. The market would annihilate the worker's humanity unless resisted by state legislation or by trade unions and other forms of association.

Similarly, by commodifying land, subjecting its product to the dictates of free trade, much of Europe's peasantry was in danger of being pauperized and uprooted. True, society's self-protection here took reactionary forms, an alliance of peasants and "feudal" landlords, "playing with traditional sentiments in their fight for agrarian tariffs." Polanyi lightly passes over this fact, which, in Germany, turned out to have dire consequences for democracy. He simply writes, "Reaction was the beneficiary of the socially useful function which it happened to perform" by resisting the inroads of the world market upon domestic agriculture.

Money, instead of functioning merely as a medium of exchange and unit of account, also was commodified. Gold, "commodity money," as Polanyi terms it, a store of value, became the monetary base indispensable to free international trade. It was the *sine qua non* of stable exchange rates. But the gold standard also subjected industry to deflationary price movements (as when an excess of imports over exports caused reductions in central banks' gold reserves, requiring higher discount rates and curtailed lending to business)—leading to lower production and rising unemployment. Thus, the commodification of money, like that of labor and land, eroded the integrality of society. Commodification was alienation in its literal sense of "otherness."

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The near autonomy of the gold standard as facilitator of the market proved to be unendurable. Trade unions and emerging labor parties objected to the dear money exacted by the gold standard and to the monetary and fiscal conservatism associated with it. Eventually this led to its modification. (Its abandonment in 1971 had quite different reasons.) Controls on capital flows and foreign exchange, meant to shield domestic currency against undue fluctuations, were introduced in the 1930s, and were to last into the 1960s.

THE SOCIAL HISTORY of the nineteenth century, Polanyi asserts, was the history of this conflict between society, seeking to shield its human substance and heritage, and the imperialism of the market driven by the lure of gain and "reducing all motivation to this lure." This last line of Polanyi's is akin to Marx's description of capital accumulation as the "Moses and the prophets" of the bourgeoisie. Both remarks are premised on the historical context of capitalistic development; they do not refer merely to psychological proclivities. For both Polanyi and Marx, as I read them, the market represents the arena where the value of commodities is "realized."

The term "conflict" does not occur prominently in Polanyi's book. Rather, he speaks of a "double movement," informed by two differing organizing principles—the one being economic liberalism insisting on the market's self-regulation; the other, social protection, "aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive capability." The notion of "double movement" seems to imply a measure of reconcilability, of occasional mutual adaptation, as successive generations of workers came to accept the discipline of factory work, and employers learned the value of the worker as a resource of know-how and experience. Yet it is no less true, as historians of labor have amply shown, that just as the worker has no access to the means of production he operates without his employer's granting it, so his or her know-how and experience may be absorbed into the design of the machinery and the industrial organization controlled by the employer. Mutual adaptation occurs, but remains transient. The gain of the ten-hour day is quickly offset by intensification of the work pace or loss of jobs from technical improvements. The underlying incompatibilities persist.

Polanyi postulates the self-regulating market as one of four pillars of nineteenth century civilization, the other three having been the balance of power, which ensured a hundred years of peace; the gold standard, which anchored the international economy; and the liberal state. The balance of power eventually disintegrated because of imperialist rivalries; the gold standard could not be sustained. Polanyi does not discuss the liberal state apart from the struggle between the classes that composed it. From his point of view, the "central institution of the century [was] production based on the free market."

The leading classes of the liberal state were unsympathetic to the aspirations of the working class. They repressed working-class demands, often by armed force. Equally important were underlying attitudes. "In England," wrote G.D.H. Cole "it became the unwritten law of the constitution that the working class must be denied the vote." It was only in 1867 that "a considerable part" of that class was enfranchised. But distrust persisted. "Inside and outside England," Polanyi writes, "from Macaulay to Mises, from Spencer to Sumner, there was not a militant liberal who did not express his conviction that popular democracy was a danger to capitalism."

Thus the contending interests of the liberal state inhabited two opposed universes. "The middle classes fulfilled their function by developing an all but sacramental belief in the universal beneficence of profit . . . while the laboring people, to a smaller or greater extent, became representatives of the common human interests that had become homeless." The breakdown of the self-regulating (world) market, however, ruined both classes, giving rise to fascism and war. Fascism indeed sought to reform the market (by autarchic measures and bilateral trade) but "at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions." It was degenerative in character, a menace to civilization. European fascism, in itself a "revolutionary movement," allied itself with counterrevolutionary and nationalist tendencies. But "in

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reality . . . [it] was determined by one factor: the condition of the market system."

Polanyi strongly endorsed government actions and programs that sought to cope with the devastations of the Great Depression, like those undertaken in the United States and the United Kingdom. The market system would cease to be self-regulating. Labor's wages and working conditions would now be determined by means of bargaining and legislation; its commodification would thus be reversed. And money and credit, no longer linked to gold, would be ruled by "functional finance"—that is, by the requirements of income stabilization, cyclical conditions, and economic growth.

INDISPUTABLY, the scope of regulatory and policy interventions in the capitalist economy during the 1930s and after spelled a new era, another "great transformation," as Polanyi noted. The emergence of employment policy, implemented by budgetary and monetary measures, as well as various welfare-state institutions, strengthened labor and limited the reach of the market. The social and economic position of business and industry, however, was revitalized, their self-confidence restored, first by the production priorities of World War II (which only they could meet), and subsequently by the investment opportunities afforded by the vast infrastructure projects initiated by government, and the economic growth and stabilization that government policies assured. The ascendancy of the dollar to reserve currency status, notwithstanding periodic weaknesses, further extended the power base of business. The institutional and ideological foundations of the self-regulating market were rebuilt and, as a result, the functions of the state as representative of society's broader interests have been narrowed or privatized. These developments have combined with the globalization of labor markets, weakening of labor organizations, and regression in the observance of labor standards. All these developments bring home the relevance of Polanyi's interpretation of the social history of the nineteenth century.

Since the early nineteenth century, Polanyi argues, the employment interest of labor and the interest of investors and bankers in the stability of monetary value have been antagonistic. The antagonism has gained in intensity since the 1970s. Resistance to inflationary price developments, themselves essentially attributed to "excessive" wage claims, replaced the goal of high employment as an economic policy priority. Guidance of the economy came to be entrusted to the Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department. Extremely high interest rates in the early 1980s (bank loans to preferred borrowers averaged an unprecedented 14 percent, in the capital-richest country on earth) helped bring on a recession that engendered the highest unemployment rates since the depression of the 1930s. The break with employment policy was itself a severe political defeat for labor; the defeat of the air traffic controller strike by the Reagan administration, clearly signaling to business that it would have broadened latitude in attacking labor, gravely weakened trade union organizing and bargaining efforts. Further undermining these efforts was (and is) increasing import competition, due to the rise in the dollar's value versus foreign currencies because of the high interest rates.

Contributing to the profound transformation in the relationship between capital and labor has been the "restructuring" of the workforce by American corporations. This has entailed (*inter alia*) reductions in the part of corporate employment that contributes least to the value-added of goods and services, and hence the outsourcing of operations more cheaply performed, here or abroad, by firms employing low-wage, less-skilled workers. "Restructuring" means the use of part-time or temporary workers having no rights to benefits to which "core" workers are entitled. This makes for "casualization" of part of the workforce—a process that has also been occurring in the countries of the European Union.

The comparatively low unemployment rates of the mid- and late 1990s stem at least partially from these developments, and the modest wage pressures they imply. In terms of purchasing power, the weekly wage in the nonagricultural economy (excepting government) in 1998, although it has gone up a bit in recent years, still ran 15 percent *below* the peak it had attained in 1973; and this notwithstanding a rise in output per hour worked (productivity)

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of 30 percent over the twenty-five-year period. It is not surprising that the Federal Reserve and Wall Street, ever ready to resist any sign of increased wage pressures, have not been exercised about low unemployment.

The spread of low-wage employment has been made somewhat acceptable by the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). While designed to aid the working poor, the EITC has effectively also been a "shadow subsidy" (as an Urban Institute scholar has put it) to employers. It tends to set a ceiling on part of the aggregate wage bill, thus helping to bolster price stability. This at the cost of perpetuating a sizeable stratum of working poor (an estimated 19.8 million workers claimed the tax credit in 1998)—given that the EITC is anchored to a poverty line that bears no relation to a living wage.

The protection of workers by legislation (society's mandate)—to follow another strand of Polanyi's argument—has been progressively eroded by disregard of labor standards. Erosion often stems from globalized competition, spurred not least by policies of export-led growth, urged by the international financial agencies upon the industrially less developed countries. The advocacy by these agencies and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of "market-clearing" wage policies to reduce unemployment, and many other recommendations that would modify, if not altogether dismantle, labor standards, aim at intensifying labor-market competition. The worker, as during the nineteenth century, would again be reduced to a cost factor, similar to other factors in production—a status whose abolition lay at the heart of labor movement demands and of much social legislation.

More perilous to the livelihood and status of working people than the erosion of labor standards—which to some limited extent they can resist—has been the unrelenting pressure of the "Wall Street-Treasury complex" to liberalize financial services worldwide, to ensure unfettered international capital markets. This is a topic that lies outside the purview of Polanyi's work. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, capital movements, while unimpeded, were closely linked to tangible objects—infrastructure projects, new factories, trade in goods. These were, and remain, normal functions of long- and short-term capital markets; they are not in question here.

Today's financial institutions have, by contrast, become a parasitic superstructure upon, and even danger to, productive enterprise. Only a small proportion, an estimated 10 percent, of international financial transactions is linked to trade in goods and services. Much of the other 90 percent represents capital whose returns come from "rents"—that is, gains from speculation on differences in interest or exchange rate values, or foreknowledge of movements in share values. The insistence with which unimpeded global capital flows are defended as promoting economic growth has little if any basis in reality. As Joseph Stiglitz, chief economist of the World Bank, wrote in *Whither Socialism,* rent-seeking

> does not increase the efficiency with which society's resources are allocated. Much of the innovation in the financial sector entails the recording of transactions more quickly, but is society really that much better off as a result? Someone might get interest that might otherwise have accrued to someone else, but have more goods been produced?

The drive toward global deregulation of banks and other financial institutions has originated chiefly with American financial service businesses facing maturing markets at home and seeking expansion abroad. Deregulation means that banks abroad grant unimpeded access to foreign investors (that is, participants in their lending and underwriting). There has been opposition to this on grounds that domestic investment objectives would tend to be neglected if they were out of line with the profit targets of foreign investors. Countries like Germany, Japan, and France kept their investment options more or less insulated, yet experienced vigorous economic growth; and the same held true until recently for East Asia, where high savings rates helped finance growth. The International Monetary Fund has rejected or ignored such arguments; the "market" alone should govern.

The "market" in financial services means that capital will flow to wherever returns on

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investment seem promising. It also means that capital will flee if losses loom. Capital flight, of which the specific causes cannot be detailed here, triggered the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998. It precipitated a great economic and social crisis as bankruptcies and soaring interest rates destroyed jobs, and as plummeting exchange rates steeply raised import prices and reduced the living standards of large parts of the affected countries' population to poverty levels. Reporters for the *New York Times* summed it up eloquently: "For . . . most Americans, these are still good times. But elsewhere in the world, hundreds of millions of people [are] caught in a severe crisis, one that has recast lives and will haunt a generation in the East just as the Great Depression shaped a generation in the West." (February 15, 1999.)

WE HAVE ENTERED an anti-Polanyian world. Polanyi viewed society as the shield of the worker's humanity against the market forces that would diminish and possibly destroy it. He saluted the constraints imposed on the labor market and finance by the democratic state, the representative of society. He would undoubtedly have supported controls on capital movements so as to prevent excessive exchange rate fluctuations and guard the priority of employment-creating domestic investment. But these expectations, shared by and large by John Maynard Keynes, were eventually swamped, as Eichengreen notes, by "the market's unanticipated resilience."

Among the reasons for this "resilience" surely was the expansionary drive of capitalist enterprise, promoted by the investment opportunities of the post-World War II era and the favorable government policies noted earlier. What was unanticipated was the rise of the market to social dominance. The nearly unrestricted freedom of international finance, the insistent process of deregulation, the urgency with which the privatization of public functions is being pursued, and the undermining of much of what trade unions achieved nationally by global financial and industrial decisions—all manifest the reign of capital, the retreat of the state, the weakening of social protection. It seems that much of the social and political history of the nineteenth century is being repeated, if in a much enlarged arena.

True, the self-protection of society began with the emergence of the labor market early in the nineteenth century; it was part of, and in large measure shaped, that century's history. But, reading Polanyi, the conflict between the mandates of social protection and the interests involved in the self-regulating market was not resolved until the depression of the 1930s and World War II threatened to demolish civilization—and to an extent actually did so. The rise of the state as ally of the worker is a recent development, which the recrudescence of the market subverts.

Is a great worldwide economic crisis once again necessary for the state to re-emerge as the agent of social self-protection? Or will the work of human rights organizations like the International Labor Organization or the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions suffice? We cannot say. It is undeniable, however, that powerful democratizing forces have come to the fore over the past two decades. And although these forces face great political and economic odds, and although Polanyi did not anticipate the vastness of the arena in which they must act, his vision of a social-democratic polity that would ensure working people's dignity and autonomy may yet carry the day. ●

HORST BRAND is a long-time contributor to *Dissent*.

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Vietnam: An Unnecessary Book

Eric Alterman

VIETNAM, THE NECESSARY WAR
by Michael Lind
The Free Press, 1999 314 pp. $25

MICHAEL LIND has written five books and edited another in just four years. *Vietnam, The Necessary War* makes that count at least one too many. This book will likely destroy Lind's reputation among serious students of the war and its domestic implications. It will certainly bring him no new admirers among that war's many millions of honorable opponents.

Politically and ideologically, Lind is unclassifiable. He began his career as an employee of conservative and neoconservative publications, only to denounce their intellectual leaders in highly conspiratorial terms. Next, he careened from left to right, publishing one day in the *Nation* (where I recruited him) and the next in *National Review*, and virtually everything in between. At one moment he is denouncing Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol for cozying up to the anti-Semitic crank Pat Robertson. Turn around, and he is viciously attacking David Halberstam, Garry Wills, and Michael Walzer for being dupes and apologists for communist dictators. Currently Washington editor of *Harper's* and a senior fellow of the New America Foundation, Lind is a seemingly limitless font of ideas and observations. Many of those that appeared in his first book, *The Next American Nation*, were quite brilliant. The ones that appear in *Vietnam*, to put it charitably, are not.

Lind's argument is as follows: he admits that Vietnam itself was of "no intrinsic value" to the United States. But the war was "necessary," nevertheless "to demonstrate America's credibility as a military power and a reliable ally to its enemies and allies around the world." Hence, U.S. political and military leaders "should have imposed an informal limit on the number of American lives it was willing to spend" in order to "preserve the military and diplomatic credibility of the United States" in the global cold war.

Reading this book, which features a bright red globe with a sinister hammer shadowed across it, it is hard to believe that Lind has been alive for the past thirty years, much less studying the history of the Vietnam War. Yes, he is able to find some recently unearthed intra-party communist braggadocio to support his thesis, as well as a few conservative historians who share some of his broad biases. But in his rush to exonerate the Johnson administration for its callous lies and strategic misjudgments, he has apparently missed out on some of the most fundamental lessons of the past quarter century.

As implied by the book's lurid cover, Lind's vision of the cold war is vintage 1965. He speaks of "the lessons of Munich" as if they were universally agreed upon and applicable across all boundaries and cultures. He resurrects the domino theory, though he calls it the "bandwagon" effect. ("After the first major defeat or retreat, or perhaps the second, third, or fourth in a row, confidence in America's military capability, or the determination to use it, would have collapsed. At that point, something akin to a panic in the stock market would have ensued. In a remarkably short period of time—a few years, perhaps even a few months—the worldwide American alliance system would have unraveled as European, Asian, Middle Eastern, African and Latin American states hurriedly made deals with Moscow.") He pays little attention to schisms within the communist world, nor to conditions of local poverty and political oppression that give rise to Marx-

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ist-tinged revolution. Amazingly, he seems to believe that the Soviet bloc "was now at the height of its global power in December 1979" following the invasion of Afghanistan. Is it possible to miss the irony here? Barely more than a decade later, this alleged global colossus would collapse of its weight, unable to shoulder even a fraction of the burden with which Lind credits it.

LIND BELIEVES that the Vietnam War was necessary to impress our allies with our seriousness of purpose. How then to explain the fact that virtually every single one of those allies thought the war to be a catastrophic and deeply debilitating diversion from the main challenges of constructing a stable postwar order amid a continuing East-West competition? In one extremely odd passage, he argues that this complaint by European and Japanese leaders "only demonstrates the degree of their anxiety about the Soviet threat and the shallowness of their confidence in American credibility." Lind must know he is on shaky ground here, as he quotes a Japanese trade official in 1982 threatening that Japan will join the communist bloc if America does not relax its pressure on Japan to open its markets. Lind admits that such threats "may not have been credible." In fact they are laughable, and no one besides Lind appears to have ever taken them seriously. He insists, however, that the "fact that they were made at all is significant." Just why, he does not say.

Lind's logic grows even stranger when he states that "what the United States needed in 1969 was a Charles DeGaulle." He apparently fails to notice that the real Charles DeGaulle had very definite things to say about the war from day one, and none are them are consistent with any of Lind's arguments. (As early as the spring of 1964, the French president told George Ball that "our position in Vietnam was hopeless" and the former French colony was a "rotten country—*le pays pourri*" as his country had learned "to its sorrow.")

Moreover Lind's history of the war is oddly checkered, cookie-cut to fit his ideological arguments. He insists that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution provided more than sufficient constitutional justification for the entire war effort, regardless of whether the Johnson administration lied about what happened there—though he cannot quite bring himself to admit that they did. (Lind also misstates the date of the first Tonkin incident, and misspells the name of the U.S. ship involved, the Maddox, making it extremely unlikely that he consulted the definitive work on the subject, Edwin E. Moise's *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, published back in 1996.) Lind compares the constitutionality of Vietnam favorably with that of Korea, noting that the latter was fought without a constitutionally mandated declaration as well. But he fails to address the point that Korea was fought under a UN Security Council resolution that legally bound the United States to intervene, and to which Congress was a party. In the case of Vietnam, all Johnson had to hang his 500,000 troops on was a hastily arranged resolution passed with no debate and based on reports that turned out to be entirely fictional. In fact virtually none of the lies Johnson told the American people about the war are mentioned here. The war's lack of democratic accountability—something that has deeply troubled the military ever since—is never addressed. Lacking therefore, is any understanding of the outrage that these lies engendered when people like Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair J.William Fulbright realized they had been purposely deceived.

Perhaps most egregious of all is Lind's treatment of the opponents of the war. Much of this section feels as though it could have been lifted from Norman Podhoretz's 1982 McCarthyite tract *Why We Were in Vietnam*. Indeed, Lind relies on many of the same primary sources, most particularly Guenter Lewy's *America in Vietnam*, published in 1978. Like Podhoretz, Lind speaks of a takeover of the Democratic Party by "left-liberals and radical activists." He lumps together the very different critiques of Noam Chomsky, William Appleman Williams, and Garry Wills, taking a gratuitous swipe at Wills's Pulitzer Prize-winning book on Abraham Lincoln, without ever mentioning that he was the recipient of a savage 1997 Wills review in the *New York Times Book Review*. He speaks of the purged Asian specialists of the State Department as "gull-

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ible dupes of Chinese communist propaganda." He refers to the Communist Party of the 1960s and 1970s as a "major institution of the American radical left," which is nonsense. He very nearly accuses Robert Kennedy of treason on the basis of the sketchiest of evidence. (The word "alleged" for RFK's "treachery" comes and goes as is convenient, though the quality of the evidence presented never improves.) Using the tactics of guilt by one-time association, he supposes that Robert McNamara's postwar dovishness "may have been motivated by personal factors comparable to those that have driven McNamara's former colleague, former attorney general Ramsey Clark, to assume the role of perpetual critic of US 'war crimes' from a position on the extreme left." (McNamara's crimes: He "made a pilgrimage to Moscow in 1986 to meet with Mikhail Gorbachev and met with Fidel Castro in Havana in 1992.")

It gets worse. Lind speaks of the "alleged 'paranoia' of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon which he takes to be a perfectly rational—even Rooseveltian—response to the radicalization of the *New York Review of Books* and the *New York Times*'s decision to publish the Pentagon Papers, as well as what he deems to be the "major role in the US antiwar movement" played by members of the U.S. Communist Party. To demonstrate how strange this is, one only has to see how deep and wide was Johnson's definition of likely communists. To take just one minor example, when Fulbright began to question the wisdom of the war on the Senate floor, the president prevailed upon J. Edgar Hoover to instigate an FBI investigation to determine whether Fulbirght was working on behalf of the communists. Hoover put Fulbright under strict surveillance and professed to discover many "parallels" between statements made by committee witnesses and "documented Communist Party publications or statements of communist leaders." On Johnson's explicit orders, Hoover's men also attempted to provide pro-war senators Everett Dirksen and Bourke Hickenlooper with "evidence that Fulbright was either a communist agent or a dupe of the communist powers." True, some paranoids have real enemies, but very few chairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are communists.

Perhaps the most offensive—and least defensible—passage here is one Lind likes so much he repeats it twice in just sixteen pages First, he writes: "Just as the socialist philosopher Michael Walzer had compared the U.S. effort in Vietnam to 'the Nazi conquests of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Belgium and Holland,' " so the novelist Kurt Vonnegut declared that "our leaders committed war crimes in the Gulf War no less surely than Nazis committed war crimes in World War II." Next comes a denunciation of Walzer's "shocking and vicious comparison" of "the U.S. effort to defend noncommunist regimes in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos against incorporation into the Communist bloc and the Nazi conquests of Czechoslovakia Poland, Denmark, Belgium and Holland."

First, the political philosopher's landmark study could hardly have less in common with the novelist's thoughtless comment, made apparently as a blurb for a book by Clark. Second, what is so "shocking and vicious" about comparing two wars? Nowhere does Walzer even remotely equate them. In fact, according to the page Lind cites, he does not say much of anything about either one. He merely creates an extremely broad category—"aggression"—and notes that both examples, along with many others, can be said to fall into it. That Lind expects anyone familiar with Walzer's work to believe that he equated the United States with Nazi Germany is both naive and foolish. That he may have wished to sully Walzer's name with those unfamiliar with his work is both morally and intellectually indefensible.

FINALLY WE must deal with the underlying morality of Lind's ultimate position. Lind argues that a strategy of "losing well" in Vietnam was worth a certain price in blood and treasure, but that the United States eventually exceeded that price, miscalculating costs and benefits. Let us accept his highly questionable worst-case scenario: that the U.S. defeat in Vietnam unleashed a "geopolitical catastrophe," resulting in "a worldwide Marxist-Leninist revolutionary wave" leaving "pro-Soviet Leninist governments in Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique Southern

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Yemen, Benin, and Congo-Brazzaville, along with loosely affiliated regimes in Zaire, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Madagascar." Later he adds Grenada and Nicaragua to the mix. I ask you, dear readers, mothers, fathers, and citizens of a democratic republic: Would you willingly give your children to save Congo-Brazzaville? Would you give them to "save" any one of the above-named nations, all of which began as dictatorships from the start? Once upon a time, the cold war was fought over areas of genuine strategic or political import: Berlin, Tehran, even potentially Rome and Paris. The mere fact that Lind is forced to list so many countries that few Americans can even pronounce demonstrates how soundly the Soviets had been defeated by the 1960s. It is a moral crime of which both sides are guilty moreover, to treat the third world populations—the "periphery" as they used to be called—as just so many plastic pawns on cheaply assembled chessboard for the purposes of impressing one another. Lind's complaint is that we did not play that murderous game long and hard enough.

Had the United States agreed to honor the 1954 Geneva accords to which it was a party and forced its client state to do the same by holding free elections, roughly two million Southeast Asians and more than 58,000 American soldiers would not have died senseless deaths on a battlefield that Lind admits held "no intrinsic value" for the United States. Perhaps Ho Chi Minh, the likely winner, would have ended Vietnamese democracy right then and there. That nation could hardly have suffered a worse fate than the cynical strategy Lind envisions would have offered it. The South Vietnamese, let us recall, were well aware of the despotic nature of the northern regime, and yet precious few of them could bring themselves to take the war seriously as anything but a for-profit operation designed to squeeze money out of their rich but foolish sponsors. There is no way to win a war when the people you are defending do not care to be defended. There is no excuse for defending one purely on the basis of its alleged symbolic value—particularly when that symbolism is hardly evident to anyone but yourself. ●

ERIC ALTERMAN is a *Nation* columnist and author of *Sound and Fury: The Making of the Punditocracy, Who Speaks for America?: Why Democracy Matters in Foreign Policy,* and *It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen.*

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Living *La Vida Grande*

Scott Sherman

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PANCHO VILLA
by Friedrich Katz
Stanford University Press, 1998 985 pp $29.95

JOHN REED once asked Pancho Villa his opinion of socialism. "Socialism—is it a thing?" Villa retorted. "I only see it in books, and I do not read much." But Villa possessed his own image of utopia: military colonies consisting of veterans of the revolution, who would subsist together in rural harmony. "My ambition is to live my life in one of those military colonies among my compañeros whom I love, who have suffered so long and so deeply with me," proclaimed Villa. "I think I would like the government to establish a leather factory there where we could make good saddles and bridles, because I know how to do that; and the rest of the time I would like to work on my little farm, raising cattle and corn. It would be fine, I think, to help make Mexico a happy place."

But Mexico is not a happy place, and Villa's was an impossible dream. Eventually he got his colony, but it was an ephemeral victory: in 1923, in one of the innumerable acts of fratricide that propelled the Mexican Revolution, he was gunned down in one of the dusty streets of Chihuahua, the sprawling border state where he spent most of his life. And what a life it was: born in squalor, deprived of education, Villa passed his early years in shadowy disrepute, and, if not for the revolution, might have languished in prison for a series of petty crimes committed in his youth. But the 1910 revolution captured his imagination, and unleashed within him hitherto unknown talents both military and political. With astonishing speed and efficiency, and with unyielding discipline, this "semiliterate former peon" fashioned the División del Norte, which, in Friedrich Katz's estimation, was "probably the largest revolutionary army that Latin America ever produced"; he presided over "the only social revolution ever to occur along the border of the United States"; and he became the only foreigner since the War of 1812 to invade American soil and get away with it.

Villa's reputation, formidable in his own lifetime, ballooned to legendary proportions after his death. Shaped by folklore, Hollywood movies, and the cynical rhetoric of the Mexican state, divergent images of him took root in public consciousness: Villa the bandit, Villa the executioner, Villa the friend of the poor, Villa the military genius. He was, in fact, all of these things: a man who adored children and rescued orphans from the streets, but also a man who shot priests and butchered civilians. Katz's biography strips away the mythology and enables us to see Villa in the cold light of reality. In a Herculean effort, the author, a distinguished historian at the University of Chicago, visited more than sixty archives in nine countries, conducted hundreds of interviews, and mastered the voluminous literature on Villa. The resulting book is full of insights and new information, and it is remarkably comprehensive.

Until this biography, the most acclaimed English-language text concerning Villa was probably John Reed's *Insurgent Mexico*, published in 1914 and recently restored to print by the Modern Library. Reed's book, which emerged from his travels with Villa's army in 1913-1914, suffers from certain defects: the author had a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish; his writing exhibited a youthful penchant for high adventure; and his assertions were sometimes erroneous. Yet it remains an astonishing feat of writing, one that Neal Ascherson has described as a "triumph of reportage literature, a work whose empathy, humor, descriptive talent and sheer verve are not matched by

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the far more famous *Ten Days*."

The book soars from the very first page:

> Mercado's Federal army, after its dramatic and terrible retreat four hundred miles across the desert when Chihuahua was abandoned, lay three months at Ojinaga on the Rio Grande. At Presidio, on the American side of the river, one could climb to the flat mud roof of the Post Office and look across the mile or so of low scrub growing in the sand to the shallow, yellow stream; and beyond to the low mesa, where the town was, sticking sharply up out of a scorched desert, ringed round with bare, savage mountains.

Insurgent Mexico evokes the eerie desolation of the Mexican landscape, the terror and chaos and anarchy of warfare, and the solidarity and dignity displayed by ordinary Mexicans in the face of violent upheaval. It is a book of reportage, but also a work of art, and it has a pungent wit and immediacy absent from Katz's text: "When the army was entraining or detraining," Reed writes, "Villa personally would be on hand in a dirty old suit, without a collar, kicking mules in the stomach and pushing horses in and out of the stock cars."

Superior works of history, Octavio Paz once wrote, combine "rigorous investigation" with "an imagination that makes the past and people and events come alive." Katz has fulfilled the first half of that injunction to breathtaking effect; it's with regard to the latter that his book falters. *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, for all its virtues, is tedious and repetitive, bloated and lifeless. It's a cold, clinical exercise: a project of the mind but not the heart. It is utterly lacking in narrative momentum, a major flaw in a book of this size; in contrast to Reed's atmospherics, it is completely devoid of landscape and physical description; and the characters rarely come to life. As Paz understood—and demonstrated in *Sor Juana*, his extraordinary life of the seventeenth-century Mexican poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—a successful biography must transport the reader to a distant time and place, and recreate them in a way that will make us want to remain there for a while. Katz's book reads like a massive compendium of bound index cards, not a seamless tapestry, and it's hardly surprising that some of the liveliest pages are those that contain extended excerpts from *Insurgent Mexico*. Villa's career intersected with those of scores of noteworthy historical figures, but Katz, with a few exceptions, fails to render them with acuity and precision. Even Villa himself, who is at the very center of the narrative, never quite materializes as a living, breathing individual. The brief but penetrating psychological portrait of Villa in Enrique Krauze's 1997 masterpiece, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, is superior to the one offered by Katz, in no small part because Krauze, one of Mexico's preeminent historians, writes with the virtuosity and omniscience of a master novelist.

Of the great leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Villa and Emiliano Zapata best represented Mexico's dispossessed and forgotten, and *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* has already been favorably compared to John Womack, Jr.'s 1968 classic *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. For an understanding of the colossal bloodbath that was the Mexican Revolution, both books are essential, but Womack's is the more appealing. From its splendid opening sentence—"This is a book about country people who did not want to move and therefore got into a revolution"—to its lyrical denouement, *Zapata* is the work of a shrewd, gifted storyteller. Unlike Katz, Womack knew what to leave out: the life spans of Villa and Zapata are nearly identical, but Womack managed to recount Zapata's life in a relatively compact 436 pages, while Katz takes 985 closely printed pages to tell his story. Because of Stanford University Press's refusal to edit this book, only the most energetic and determined reader will finish it.

VILLA WAS BORN in 1878 in the frontier region of northern Mexico—a "ferocious and pitiless environment," in Krauze's words, a "school of life for the man whose epic incarnates a profound area of the Mexican soul, its darkest and most vengeful anger, its most innocent aspirations for the light." Villa's early years are shrouded in mystery, but Katz's investigation reveals that the young revolutionary engaged in "a strange coexistence of legal and illegal" activities: he was a soldier, small-time bandit, cattle rustler, butcher, mule driver, and trainer of fighting

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cocks. In contrast to the dominant figures of the Mexican Revolution, Villa was politically inexperienced. But he was well acquainted with the decadence and cronyism of Chihuahua's political class, the violence and lawlessness of everyday life, and the massive concentration of wealth and land in the hands of the state's tiny aristocracy, which forced much of Chihuahua's population to live in quasi-servitude. Not surprisingly, it was Chihuahua, in 1910, that spearheaded the revolt against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who had clung to power since 1876.

At the center of the upsurge was Francisco Madero, a courageous aristocrat who spent years building grassroots opposition to Diaz. Villa, thirty-two years old and already renowned as a gunman, was recruited by one of Madero's deputies, who may have promised him amnesty from past crimes should the revolution succeed. An American doctor who knew Villa well provided the following description:

> He is about 5 feet 10 inches in height, and weighs about 170 lbs., is well developed in a muscular way; has a very heavy protruding lower jaw and badly stained teeth; a rather dandified moderately heavy moustache of a heavy villian variety; crispy kinky black hair of the Negro type, which is generally tousled. He has the most remarkable pair of prominent brown eyes I have ever seen.

Villa's ruthlessness and charisma, his dexterity with horses and weaponry, and his deep personal connection to his soldiers made him an essential asset to Madero. When the dictator capitulated and fled to Europe in 1911, Villa, in a choice he would make again and again, shunned political power in Mexico City and instead returned to his beloved Chihuahua, where he built a house, settled down with one of his many wives, and acquired a chain of butcher shops, which he outfitted with the latest American refrigeration technology.

Madero remains an enigma. Born to one of Mexico's wealthiest families, imbued with mystical beliefs and nineteenth-century liberal values, he was appalled by the poverty, repression and illiteracy of Porfirian Mexico. But when he finally attained the presidency, he put his faith in the army and the aristocracy, and was betrayed by them: in 1913, Madero was assassinated in a coup spearheaded by General Victoriano Huerta and encouraged by the U.S. Ambassador, Henry Lane Wilson. Before the coup, Huerta and Wilson had pressured Madero to imprison Villa in Mexico City, where he languished for months. After Madero's death, Villa escaped to El Paso, Texas, where he immediately began to organize armed resistance to Huerta. In March 1913, Villa returned to Mexico with eight men; a year later, he was virtually in control of the state and immediately began to engage in what Katz calls "Robin Hood-type acts of social justice": Seizing one of Chihauhua's largest haciendas, Villa swiftly executed its administrator, a man renowned for his cruelty.

To avenge Madero's death, Villa forged an army that would eventually grow to a hundred thousand men and that would alter the course of the revolution: the División del Norte. Composed of peasants, ex-convicts, cowboys, miners and drifters (and their wives and girlfriends) it was a formidable military machine whose strength rested on cavalry attacks undertaken in the dead of night. Reed, who provides a marvelous description of Villa's army, was particularly enamored of the traveling field hospital: "Forty boxcars enameled inside, fitted with operating tables and all the latest appliances of surgery, and manned by more than sixty doctors and nurses." Villa instantly distinguished himself as a shrewd and unorthodox commander who, in Reed's estimation, relied on "an entirely original method of warfare, because he never had a chance to learn anything of accepted military strategy." The División del Norte reached its zenith in 1913-1914, when it engaged the federal army in a series of terrible battles at Torreón and Zacatecas, battles entailing monstrous violence and savagery. These stunning victories, which contributed decisively to Huerta's defeat, generated international headlines, and Villa found himself courted by the Mutual Film Corporation, with whom he signed an exclusive contract to film the maneuvers of the División del Norte.

The campaign against Huerta left the Villistas in control of Chihuahua and its

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300,000 citizens for much of 1914 and 1915. The state was instantly transformed into a laboratory for Villa's political ideology, and Katz sees "strong elements of socialism" in the resulting experiment. The oligarchy was banished, its vast landholdings transferred to Villa's officers and soldiers (but not to ordinary Chihuahuans); the distribution of meat was taken over by the state, and its price drastically reduced; more than one hundred schools were built; free medical care was instituted; a wide range of benefits was extended to widows and orphans of those killed in battle; and the new Villista currency vastly augmented the buying power of the poor. Katz is careful not to romanticize Villista Chihuahua—"there were no elections, the press did not criticize the government, and criticism of Villa was unheard of," he writes—but he is obviously impressed by Villa's accomplishments

With Huerta vanquished, the revolution swiftly devoured itself, as warfare erupted between Villa and his erstwhile comrade in arms, Venustiano Carranza. For a while Villa and Zapata's troops occupied Mexico City, and the revolution, which was ultimately won by a corrupt elite, might have developed a more egalitarian cast had they remained there. But in the annals of revolution, Villa was noteworthy: a man indifferent to state power. Unlike Carranza, he had no desire to be president—indeed, it was his firm conviction that he was "not educated enough to be President of Mexico"—and he quickly withdrew from the capital, as did Zapata. Disregarding the advice of his generals, who urged an immediate attack on the vulnerable Carrancista army in Veracruz, Villa, in an ill-fated decision, instead retreated to the north. Shortly thereafter, in a series of confrontations with Carranza's forces at Celaya in central Mexico, he met his match in general Alvaro Obregón. Obregón, inspired by the military tactics being employed in Europe during World War I, instructed his soldiers to dig trenches fortified by barbed wire and machine guns. Villa's troops—resorting, as usual, on cavalry assaults—fell into the trap and were cut to pieces: 3,000 Villistas were killed; 6,000 were taken prisoner; and 120 officers were executed. Obregón reported with satisfaction that "the Villistas have left the field strewn with bodies." Villa's decline had begun.

Beset by food shortages and disease, the División del Norte, in full retreat, clashed with Carrancista troops in the border town of Agua Prieta in the fall of 1915. It was another trap: Unknown to Villa, the U.S. government allowed Carranza's troops to pass through Arizona to reinforce its garrison, and the Villistas were taken by surprise and routed. (Katz's analysis of U.S. policy toward Villa is superb, as is his account of the rogue's gallery of con men and scoundrels who flocked to his side.) Villa, for purely pragmatic reasons, had always protected U.S. citizens and their property, so Woodrow Wilson's action came as a shock. Motivated by fury, but also by a desire to provoke a U.S. invasion of Mexico, Villa, with a much smaller force, invaded Columbus, New Mexico in the early morning hours of March 9, 1916. In Katz's fine account of the skirmish, which left seventeen Americans dead, we learn that Villa, at the last moment, had serious doubts abou the invasion, but his officers urged him to press ahead. In the ensuing debacle, Villa's troops were forced to retreat across the border, with five thousand troops under the leadership of John J. Pershing in hot pursuit.

CHIHUAHUA was now in the hands of Carrancista forces, who rolled back the Villista reforms and reinstated the oligarchy. Using weapons and ammunition he had buried in the Chihuahuan desert during his heyday, Villa responded with guerrilla warfare. Thus began five dark years of protracted and senseless bloodshed in Chihuahua. With his greatest triumphs behind him, and with his enemies at his heels, Villa returned to his youthful roots as a bandit and an outlaw, and now permitted his dwindling group of soldiers—who consisted of sycophants, thugs, and unlucky souls conscripted at gunpoint—to steal cattle, plunder property owned by foreigners, loot stores, and terrorize civilians. The Carrancistas responded with scorched-earth tactics, and Villa suffered the loss of his most cherished comrades. In one of the book's few genuinely affecting moments, Katz records his stunned response to the death of Martín López: "What? What are you saying? Martin is dead . . . my loyal and courageous boy? My

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favorite leader, in whom I had placed all my hopes as a warrior? He came to me when he was only eleven years old."

The final third of Katz's book contains chilling examples of what Katz, a bit complacently, repeatedly refers to as Villa's "moral decline." Early in the narrative, the author informs us that "deciding whether to execute someone was not a problem over which Villa agonized for long," and, as the war of attrition dragged on, his latent propensity for violence became more pronounced. Following a hideous battle in early 1917, Villa ordered the execution of six hundred prisoners. His elite guards, writes Katz, "lined the men up in rows of five, and in order to save bullets they were killed with one shot to the head." Even Villa's deputy, no stranger to carnage, declared that the "parade of these groups of five was something horrible to see."

The Mexican Revolution was approaching its denouement. Zapata was betrayed and murdered in 1919, Carranza met the same fate a year later, and Villa finally made his peace with the regime. His consolation prize was a fortified 163,000 acre estate in Canutillo, Durango. Villa was now in possession of the military estate he wished for. Surrounded by hundreds of his most dependable soldiers, who served as bodyguards, Villa planted potatos and peanuts, built a school in which he took enormous pride, and for the most part lived the tranquil existence of a *hacendado*. But military discipline permeated his utopia: Villa insisted that everyone begin work at 4:00 a.m., and when a visitor inquired about whether any robberies had taken place on the estate, Villa replied: "Look—here in Canutillo nothing is lost, for if anyone steals, I have him shot."

Katz's concluding assessment of Villa is sanguine. He minimizes Villa's "moral decline"—which, by the end of the book, is precisely what lingers in the mind—and chooses to emphasize his achievements: the destruction of Huerta and the old regime; the institution of moderate land reform in Chihuahua; and the doomed revolutionary experiment of 1913-1915, in which goods were redistributed to the poor, schools constructed, meat dispensed at low cost, expectations raised. "In some ways," concludes Katz, "it might be called the first welfare state in Mexican history." To the end of his life, Villa professed his loyalty to the ideals of Madero, but his passion for social justice seemed to recede with the years. "Equality does not exist and cannot exist," he told a visiting journalist in 1922. "It is a lie that we can all be equal. . . . For me society is a big stair with some people at its lower end, some people in the middle, some rising, and some very high. . . I would never fight for the equality of the social classes." His true fidelity, it seems, was not to the Mexican people—most of whom, he affirmed at the end of his life, "were too ignorant to understand my ideas"—but to his beloved soldiers: "my compañeros whom I love."

WHILE VILLA was busy tending to his crops and his cattle, a ferocious struggle to consolidate the revolution was underway in Mexico City. Villa, full of confidence and bluster, intervened by bluntly asserting his political aspirations, and he derived a special pleasure in taunting his old adversary, Obregón. Indeed, Villa's demise was probably the result of an unfortunate remark to a journalist: "Sir, I do not believe that anyone has the support that Francisco Villa has. . . .For this reason the politicians are afraid of me . . . .they know that on the day I decide to fight, I shall destroy them." Villa added: "I can mobilize 40,000 men in forty minutes."

In late July of 1923, Villa made a rare journey outside Canutillo, and did so by car, for, as Katz notes, "Villa had fallen in love with automobiles." In the town of Parral, a small group of assassins, probably sent by the federal government, was waiting for him. An elderly candy vendor gave the prearranged signals. "Villa was hit by nine bullets and killed instantly," writes Katz, who relates the facts in lackluster fashion. Krauze, on the other hand, notes that Parral had "an oddly mysterious quality" on the day of the assassination, and provides this account:

> The vehicle was coming and Villa himself was at the wheel. The car turned the corner to meet with a massive blast of gunfire. All the occupants of that mysterious house fired at once on the Dodge. The car veered out of control and crashed into a tree. Nearly everyone was killed,

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almost instantly. The moans and the cries died away. One of the attackers rushed out to put a bullet in Villa's head. His lifeless body was already doubled up near the driver's door, the right hand still reaching for his gun. His skull was full of holes, and in the autopsy it was hard to find his heart. It had been turned to pulp by the expanding bullets used by his assassins.

Three years after his murder, thieves ransacked Villa's grave and absconded with his skull, a turn of events that prompts Krauze to wonder: "Did they want the bones of an angel or a souvenir of cold iron?" ●

SCOTT SHERMAN's articles have appeared in the *Nation, Lingua Franca*, and the *New York Observer.*

The New Deal: His and Hers

Ruth Rosen

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT:
VOLUME TWO, 1933-1938
by Blanche Wiesen Cook
Viking, 1999 696 pp $34.95

IN DIVORCE COURT, lawyers and judges often hear amazingly different stories about a marriage that has long disintegrated. In history, as well, there are also his and her renditions of the past. For Americans who loved FDR as well as those who loathed him, it was his alphabet agencies, his support of labor, his public works, and his cheerful optimism that came to define the era that we call the New Deal. But there was also another New Deal, one that Eleanor Roosevelt championed, an agenda yoked to the vast number of women social reformers and peace activists with whom she had worked since the early years of the twentieth century. In this second volume of her biography of the most extraordinary First Lady in American history, Blanche Wiesen Cook writes about that other New Deal, the one that ER fought for, in battles she sometimes won, but mostly lost.

In the first volume of her biography, Blanche Wiesen Cook introduced readers to ER's lonely and awkward youth and tracked her transformation from a cowed young woman married to a philandering politician into a grown woman determined to break the shackles of her marriage. How she might do that, she did not yet know.

In the second volume, which covers the years 1933-1938, Cook offers a historical account of a mature ER who, with courage and connections, invented new ways to navigate or side-step the politics of Washington, and who relentlessly tried to keep her pragmatic husband focused on the needs of women, children, minorities, and the poor.

By the time FDR took office in 1933, ER had broken enough shackles to achieve some of her life's goals. As a businesswoman, she co-owned the Val-Kill Craft Factory. As a political leader, she edited and co-published the *Women's Democratic News*. As an educator, she co-owned and taught at a New York school for girls.

Having come of age during the women's reform and peace movements of the Progressive Era, ER rarely saw the pragmatism of party politics as a political touchstone. Instead, she judged behavior by the ideals of such extraordinary leaders as Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House settlement house and the international women's peace movement; Florence Kelley, the socialist-feminist leader of the National Consumer's League, Carrie Chapman Catt, the leader of the last suffrage campaign and a major figure in the international peace movement; and hundreds of other women reformers who had begun to build an embryonic welfare system during her youth.

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This was a generation of women who championed trade unions, safety and health standards, fair work practices, the end of child labor, consumer labels, and industrial codes. These were the women who introduced kindergartens, public health programs, free evening classes, mothers' pensions, compulsory free education, and social work into American life.

At age forty-eight, ER nevertheless entered the White House with considerable trepidation. All of her predecessors, she knew, had either died or fallen ill in office. "Tough and resilient," writes Cook, "ER set out to create another example." Soon she learned how to take advantage of her role as insider. With dogged determination, she badgered and lobbied for most of the ideals she cherished. Accustomed to a domineering, intrusive, and opinionated mother, FDR mostly put up with a stern, scolding, moralizing Eleanor, who, as Cook point outs, could be "mean and cold and disagreeable." But the president also "admired his wife, appreciated her strengths, and depended on her integrity." Fiercely competitive with FDR, in politics as well as in their personal lives, ER even set herself the task of matching FDR's presidential salary. As soon as she had earned $75,000, a jubilant ER wrote a friend, "I've done it! I've earned as much as Franklin." She then gave almost all her earnings to various causes.

A principled, at times even self-righteous, moralist, Eleanor spent her years in the White House engaged in combat with the pragmatic realism of her affable and charming husband. As Cook describes it, they each ran their own administrations and "courts." FDR and ER, for example, each targeted different projects, traveled with a special entourage, and socialized with different friends in remarkably dissimilar ways.

As first lady, ER's relationship to her world of women only deepened. Ever since 1918, when she discovered her husband's affair with Lucy Mercer, ER had gone her own way, forming a romantic relationship with journalist Lorena Hickcok that became the core of her emotional life. Through constant letters, she and "Hick" nurtured an ardent, passionate, tumultuous, and intimate relationship, punctuated by brief encounters and vacations, and sustained by occasional dreams of a shared future. During FDR's first term, Hick gave up her journalistic career and took a position reporting on the New Deal's impact on social and economic conditions to the administration. On the road, lonely and longing, Hick felt neglected by ER, whose life was filled with hundreds of responsibilities—FDR, her children, and her New Deal projects—that prevented them from seeing each other with any regularity. To console Hick, ER wrote in one letter,

> I believe it gets harder to let you go each time . . . .It seems as though you belonged near me, but even if we lived together we would have to separate sometimes and just now what you do is of such value to the country that we ought not complain only that doesn't make me miss you less or feel less lonely . . . .Darling, I ache for you . . .

Still, Hick's discontent only grew, causing tension and eventually, even greater distance between the two women.

ER also socialized with Marion Dickerman, Nancy Cook and Caroline O'Day, among many other women friends with whom she shared her private enclave, Val-Kill, a small oasis at New Hyde Park where she avoided both her husband and her mother-in law. In addition, ER took the unprecedented step of renting an apartment in lower Manhattan, where she hap-

INDEX AVAILABLE

The cumulative index for volumes 45 and 46 of *Dissent* is available from the *Dissent* office, 521 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700, New York, N.Y., 10017. Please send a stamped (55 cents postage), self-addressed 9" x 11" envelope. *Dissent* is also indexed in *Academic Abstracts*, the Alternative Press Index, the Infotrak Academic Index, Left Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin*, University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, the *Social Science Source*, and *Sociological Abstracts*.

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pily met her friends and escaped the attention of the Secret Service, and the crush of the press and the crowds.

While ER spent her happiest times secluded with Hick and her closest women friends, a merry and garrulous FDR sailed up and down the Eastern seaboard or enjoyed rollicking evening parties, fueled by the finest liquor and wines, at which his secretary and confidante Missy Le Hand joined him in witty conversation and magnificent feasts.

One of Cook's most amusing stories concerns ER's stubborn unwillingness to fire Henrietta Nesbitt, the White House chief chef "who ruined the president's food on a regular basis." Nesbitt's culinary disasters were notorious in the nation's capital. Experienced dinner guests regularly dined out before arriving at White House dinners. Friends even sneaked gourmet tidbits to a president who craved exquisite meals. For twelve years, FDR bitterly complained. ER could have found other employment for Nesbitt and FDR certainly could have fired her. But neither of them took any action to change the situation. Cook interprets Eleanor's behavior as just one of the passive-aggressive weapons she routinely used in their daily power struggle, a revealing example of how sexual politics and power struggles shaped and sustained the marriage of these two quite remarkable individuals.

"The key to ER's politics," writes Cook, "was her ability to empathize with the poorest, loneliest, most needful people in every circumstance. Her ethic was simple: She wanted to see the best she could imagine for herself and her loved ones made available to everyone." As First Lady, ER tried to turn that goal into a reality. She constantly brought her own agenda directly into the White House. To amplify her message, she also lectured and lobbied for her political agenda as a radio broadcaster and, by 1936, began writing a daily syndicated column called "My Day." But she repeatedly bumped up against the pragmatism of party politics.

With her upper-class formality and unfailing graciousness, ER seemed like a contained, even unflappable, First Lady. But in truth she was relentless, and FDR and ER probably drove each other crazy. Cook's captivating account reveals stories for which there are probably no comparisons. It is almost unthinkable, for example, to imagine Hillary Clinton writing newspaper articles attacking her husband's policies. And yet ER did this regularly. Besides leaving notes in a basket beside his bed—nearly every night—she publicly challenged him on how he should shape the New Deal.

FDR AND ER'S combative and competitive marriage sparked the greatest political creativity this nation witnessed during the twentieth century. But he believed in politics, and she believed in economic justice. For FDR, the New Deal was a strategic way of saving the nation from economic poverty and despair. For ER, it was the culmination of decades of women reformers' work, creating a welfare state that would protect society's neediest and most vulnerable citizens.

In 1933, ER published her first major book, *It's Up To the Women*. Drawing upon a lifetime spent in the political culture of women's movements, she believed that women had to assume national responsibility for ensuring a healthy, well-educated population. ER risked constant ridicule and public damnation to reach that goal. To force editors to hire more female reporters, she banned male journalists from her press conferences, so newspapers and maga-

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zines had to hire and train women who could cover Eleanor's frantic schedule. Every Monday morning, ER met with her "newsgirls" and explained her dreams for a New Deal. And if it didn't exactly match that of her husband, well, that's just the way it was.

The first hundred days of the New Deal, for example, had done nothing for the estimated 140,000 women who wandered the streets and hobo encampments of America. Nor had any New Deal programs addressed the needs of the millions of unemployed women. What about the married women fired by the government? asked ER in her writings and at her press conferences. It turned out that nine out of ten of these women, many of whose husbands were unemployed, needed to support their families. And what about all the single women ignored by the public works projects? she challenged the administration. Why couldn't they work in the Civilian Conservation Corps? Where was the New Deal for women? Her questions never stopped.

Franklin listened to both her private and public complaints, often agreed, but rarely implemented her more radical agenda. When ER and her platoon of women peace activists begged him to forgive the foreign debt at the 1933 London Economic Council, first he seemed to agree, then he waffled, and then he refused, declaring the national economy to be more important. Against all odds, ER brought African Americans into the White House, determined to challenge FDR's political obligations to southern whites. When ER and her coalition of white liberals and African Americans pleaded with FDR to support an anti-lynching bill, he passively supported the southern Dixiecrats instead. When ER and labor democrats implored FDR to include domestic and agricultural workers (mostly African Americans) in the new Social Security legislation, he once again pacified his southern democratic base, which he needed for reelection. As always in twentieth-century America history, race both shaped and narrowed the possibilities of political action.

Whenever ER's ideas genuinely failed to interest the President, she simply pursued them anyway. In Scott's Run, West Virginia, one of the poorest areas of the country, ER found private and public funds with which to create an experimental community of single-family homesteads. Critics ridiculed Arthurdale; government officials griped about the waste of public funds. But to ER, Arthurdale meant providing the poorest of the poor with shelter, modern conveniences, subsistence farming, and factory jobs.

As the war drew closer, ER found herself increasingly shut out of her husband's administration. Silenced by the State Department, she never reported the horror of German cruelty against Jews to the American people. Instead, she traveled the country, visiting Jewish communities and synagogues, denouncing anti-Semitism in America.

In the hands of a less talented writer, the threads of all these personal and public stories might have unraveled. But Blanche Wiesen Cook has managed to produce a tightly woven tapestry, one that offers the reader a vivid and engaging portrayal of ER—her marriage and friendships, her personal and political passions. Perhaps most original is Cook's account of ER's New Deal, the one that failed, leaving an unfinished agenda for America's poor, women, and minorities. Thirty years later, that same vision of social and economic justice rocked the nation, igniting a thirty-year cultural war. Then, in the 1990s, what was left of ER's New Deal was attacked by those who believe that government, rather than poverty and despair, is the greatest evil facing the American people.

But history does not end, despite the wishful thinking of the fans of unfettered capitalism. Sooner or later, the American people will once again consider whether an unfunded and weakened government can care for the public health and their common good. ER's dream of a New Deal—not yet accepted, not yet rejected—still remains at the very heart of our nation's most fiercely debated political ideals. ●

Ruth Rosen is a professor of history at the University of California, Davis. Her new book, *The World Split Open: How The Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, will be published by Viking in February 2000.

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The Spy Who Stayed Out in the Cold

A COVERT LIFE: JAY LOVESTONE, COMMUNIST, ANTI-COMMUNIST, AND SPYMASTER
by Ted Morgan
Random House, 1999 402 pp $29.95

Benjamin Martin

AMERICAN LABOR has played a central role in U.S. foreign policy over the past six decades. Yet because of the difficulties in attaining a balanced grasp of a subject so enshrouded in controversy and secrecy, little of worth has been published about it thus far.

Ted Morgan's study of the career of Jay Lovestone, the former leader of the Communist Party who became the foreign operations confidant of the AFL-CIO's George Meany is, therefore, most welcome. Though providing a flawed interpretation, Morgan has unearthed a good deal of new information that will serve as a valuable source for future historians.

Since early in this century, disillusioned ex-radicals have often served as foreign-policy advisers to the labor movement. But the role of Jay Lovestone over three decades beginning in the 1940s was exceptional.

In 1927, at the age of twenty-nine, Lovestone became general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). He retained that post for the next two years, aided by his growing friendship with Nicolai Bukharin, the eminent Bolshevik theoretician and head of the Communist International. But as Stalin consolidated his power, he conducted a purge of his potential rivals. First it was Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev; then he moved to eliminate Bukharin. In 1928, Stalin executed a sharp turn to the left by adopting the "Third Period" policy, which radically quickened the pace of industrialization and collectivization in the Soviet Union and predicted imminent capitalist collapse and global revolutionary upheaval. Bukharin, who remained an exponent of moderation in domestic policies and of a more realistic view of Western capitalism, was branded a "right deviationist."

Lovestone had supported Stalin's purge of Trotsky, but his close relationship with Bukharin assured Stalin's enmity. Seeking to insulate his party from the ruinous consequences of third-period extremism, Lovestone vainly sought the acceptance of his "American Exceptionalist" doctrine, which viewed American capitalism as strong and ascendant. Though Lovestone and his supporters possessed overwhelming support in the CPUSA, he was removed at Stalin's behest in 1929 and his supporters expelled.

Organizing a tiny dissident communist group, Lovestone at first supported Soviet policies and sought readmission. By the late thirties, with the Moscow trial and execution of Bukharin, he underwent a change of heart and increasingly moved toward anticommunism. By 1941, when Garment Workers leader David Dubinsky introduced Lovestone to the American Federation of Labor's secretary-treasurer George Meany, Dubinsky was able to say, "The son of a bitch is okay, he's been converted."

In the 1920s and 1930s, Dubinsky had engaged in a bruising battle with the communists for control of the garment unions, and had emerged from this bitter confrontation a passionate anticommunist. Meany was a conservative Irish Catholic from the building trades, who had a quality rare among labor leaders: a strong and active interest in labor's international activities. In 1944 the American Federation of Labor created the Free Trade Union Committee, and on Dubinsky's recommendation Meany named Lovestone as its executive secretary. For the next three decades Lovestone served as Meany's secretary of state.

The advent of the cold war and the

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Marshall Plan to aid postwar European recovery thrust trade unions into the front lines of East-West confrontation. Labor strength in France and Italy provided the Communist Parties there with a potent means for threatening economic and political stability. In the third world, East and West competed for the allegiance of the fledgling trade unions, which served both as institutional supports for the newly independent nations and as sources of political leadership. Such developments enormously increased the international importance of the American labor movement.

The greatly enhanced role of American labor in foreign affairs became a source of competition between the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). It turned out not to be much of a contest. Walter and Victor Reuther, who led the United Auto Workers, were foreign affairs activists, but CIO president Phil Murray displayed little interest in overseas activities. Even more of a liability was the CIO's continued affiliation with the Soviet-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions and the presence of pro-communists in the CIO leadership staff.

Highly adept in the uses of power in Washington, Meany, who became AFL president in 1952, easily outmaneuvered the CIO leadership in securing control of government funding and appointments in the state and labor departments. The assignment of AFL and CIO personnel to government labor posts was supposed to be determined by an agreed upon apportionment, but this arrangement soon came to naught, especially as the Meany-Walter Reuther rivalry intensified. (Reuther became CIO president in 1952.) Personnel appointed to serve as labor attaches in the foreign service had to demonstrate a first loyalty to Lovestone/Meany or face being eliminated or shunted off to dead-end assignments. Only a handful of independents and CIOers managed to survive. Meany's dominance even included the field of labor intelligence and clandestine funding.

What Morgan fails to tell us is that what underlay this abject surrender by government authorities of foreign labor activities was a tacit understanding between Meany and the vari-

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ous Democratic administrations that this was the price to be paid for labor's political support. Republican administrations followed suit in return for labor's cooperation in attaining cold war objectives. The arrangement was to endure until the end of Lane Kirkland's reign as AFL-CIO president.

Uninformed critics have accused Meany-Lovestone of acting as servile executors of government foreign policies. The fact was that Meany was his own man, and both the White House and the Central Intelligence Agency often had to acquiesce in policies that were not to their liking. (This was particularly the case regarding the Soviets and China.) Referring to Irving Brown, Lovestone's man in Europe and long-time political crony, senior diplomat Philip Habib recalled, "We didn't use the sonafabitch, the sonafabitch used us."

IN MANY PARTS of the world the AFL-CIO was more interested in fighting communists than in aiding trade unions. In Latin America, for example, a tendency to overemphasize anticommunist credentials in selecting recipients of largesse often caused the AFL-CIO to become an embarrassment. Well-meaning trade unionists at times provided valuable assistance to struggling Latin American labor organizations, and several representatives of the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development in El Salvador became the victims of rightist death squads; all too often, however, in the name of anticommunism, assistance went to the Somozas, the Batistas, the Balaguers, the Stroessners. AIFLD's principal client in Chile, the head of the dockworkers union, ended up as the Pinochet dictatorship's labor attache in Washington. AIFLD activities became the subject of angry exchanges between Meany and Senators Fulbright and Morse. Troubled by Meany's refusal to provide assistance to the small but influential Christian-democratic unions in the region, Vice President Hubert Humphrey sought to change Meany's mind, but in vain. (Meany objected to their denunciations of "U.S. imperialism.")

Morgan tends to understate the virulence of the Meany-Reuther rivalry and its impact on foreign labor affairs. The Meany-Lovestone relationship was based not only on a shared anticommunist fundamentalism but on a common detestation of Walter Reuther and his ideas. Reuther had become Lovestone's *bête noir* in the thirties during a battle for control of the United Auto Workers. Bankrolled by Dubinsky, Lovestonites were the principal supporters of Homer Martin, then head of the UAW. Dubinsky feared a communist takeover of the CIO's second largest affiliate; Reuther viewed a tactical alliance with the communists as a lesser evil than continued control by the erratic, unstable Martin. In his successful campaign to capture the leadership of the UAW, Reuther broke with the communists, destroying much of their considerable strength in the union, and in the course of his life he evolved from a procommunist socialist to an anticommunist social democrat. But he had nonetheless earned the undying resentment of a defeated Jay Lovestone.

Charismatic, an excellent popular orator, a man of ideas, Walter Reuther possessed many of the qualities Meany lacked. It was not so much that Reuther was the darling of Eleanor

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Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, and other "liberal pinkos." What really exasperated Meany was that though he himself had become the American labor movement's single most powerful figure (the AFL and CIO merged in 1955 with Meany as its head), Reuther was not only America's favorite labor leader, he was idolized throughout Europe and the developing world. While he, George Meany, stood steadfast against any compromise to the communists, Reuther advocated a flabby anticommunism and a policy of detente. Meany was a Rock of Gibraltar to the Johnson and Nixon administrations on Vietnam; Reuther became a leading opponent of the war.

In a chapter entitled "Lovestone's Second Front," Morgan provides an account of Meany/Lovestone's tortuous relationship with the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the AFL-CIO's withdrawal. This is arguably the weakest and least reliable part of the book. Morgan attributes Meany's unhappiness with the Europeans and the ICFTU officialdom primarily to his growing exasperation with financial mishandling and bureaucratic bungling. But this was only a pretext. What caused his alienation was the European trade union community's changing attitude toward the communist East. By the fifties, as nuclear parity developed, Western Europeans and even Washington policy makers were intent upon a reduction of tensions. It had become too dangerous to maintain the old levels of adversarial confrontation. Willy Brandt and the German Social Democrats promoted the doctrine of detente. By the sixties and seventies a growing number of noncommunist unions, including the UAW, began to engage in exchange visits with labor delegations from the Eastern bloc. Such notions were anathema to Meany, who advocated unremitting confrontation. More than any other factor, it was widening differences over changing views on relations with the East that led to Meany's decision to leave the world labor body, despite urgings to the contrary by Lovestone.

It may be good for book sales to portray Jay Lovestone as "one of the masterminds of the cold war" and as a "spymaster," as Morgan does in *A Covert Life*. Indeed, Lovestone did contribute to the labor movement's overseas anticommunist effort, especially in the years just after the Second World War. But Meany would have pursued his rigid anticommunist policies even if he had never met Lovestone. What is indisputable is that the Meany/Lovestone foreign policy outlook served to strongly alienate the labor movement's traditional ally, the liberal, progressive community.

WHAT MORGAN documents vividly is the exclusively ultraconservative inclinations of Lovestone's circle of friends and confidants. "Lovestone was an ideologue," Morgan rightly observes, "and the trouble with ideologues is they tend to discount any change that disturbs their system of beliefs. The world changed but Lovestone [like Meany] remained frozen in his positions...He had a vested interest in the Cold War—it was his livelihood and purpose—and he kept fanning its embers long after the fire had gone out."

Possibly the AFL-CIO's greatest anticommunist triumph resulted from the funding of *Solidarnosc* in Poland when much of the European trade union community, fearful of endangering East-West detente, was reluctant to support Lech Walesa and his embattled supporters. By that time, however, forcibly retired, Lovestone had left the scene and Meany had been succeeded by Lane Kirkland.

The long awaited changing of the guard in the AFL-CIO that came with John Sweeney's ousting of Lane Kirkland, Meany's successor and ideological heir, was hastened by a growing restiveness among executive council members over a leadership that spent more time and money on foreign affairs than on organizing the unorganized. A further sign of the changing times: Ronald Reagan awarded the Medal of Freedom to veteran Lovestoneite Irving Brown; Bill and Hillary Clinton last year bestowed a similar award, posthumously, on Walter Reuther. ●

BENJAMIN MARTIN is a former trade unionist and State Department senior labor research specialist. He is the author of *The Agony of Modernization, Industry and Labor in Spain*.

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Florida Fantasy

Todd Gitlin

AMERICAN BEACH: HOW PROGRESS ROBBED A BLACK TOWN—AND NATION—OF HISTORY, WEALTH, AND POWER
by Russ Rymer
HarperCollins, 1998 337 pp. $25 cloth $14 paper

RUSS RYMER has written a powerful book of what C. Wright Mills called "sociological poetry," escorting the reader into a world that is unknown to most everyone who doesn't live there, the historically black Florida Atlantic Coast island community of American Beach. Rymer persuasively suggests that this settlement not far from Jacksonville, founded in the 1930s as a resort for blacks and now decaying, encroached upon by luxury hotels and golf courses, is "America distilled into something strong and clear," a microcosm for the unending saga of the enslavement of Africans in America, and a fit place to inspect the relationships of the poor to the rich, the losers to the winners, in an America that thinks "you're history" means "you're over and done with."

American Beach was published in November 1998 by a commercial publisher—that is to say, it was let loose into an indifferent world behind a whirlwind called Monica Does Bill, so that, while well reviewed, it was not an Event. It did not come stamped with a thesis ready-made to be transmitted via sound bites into the airlock where Imus, Winfrey, and other impresarios escort hot cultural products into media daylight. It was not written by a name author, although Rymer has written for many name magazines, and his first book, *Genie: A Scientific Tragedy*, was also well reviewed. *American Beach* was full of the strangeness and pain of American life, and it was not averse to significant ideas and it was splendidly written, but it did not buzz. It investigated wrongs, but it was not investigative. It was deeply concerned with the workings of American society, it was, in fact, a textbook case of the sociological imagination—which (as Mills defined it) sees private troubles as public issues—but it was not an issues book, it was rather a book about American reality, "A Saga of Race, Wealth, and Memory," in the words of the original subtitle, that, along the way, brought to life issues of land use, racial injustice, police malfeasance, and black culture. It was full of finely drawn characters, including police, tough guys, old women, businessmen, a college president, and most remarkably the central character, a woman with no fixed domicile who has taken a vow of poverty, a "six-foot-tall, sixtyish black woman dressed in flip-flops and layers of felt, with eighteen-inch fingernails and a five-foot fall of hair festooned with political buttons, trained down her back, carried in a ball at her waist, and coifed into a foot-high cock's comb atop her head," who despite her remarkable appearance had not been featured on *Oprah* or Jerry Springer's show. She wasn't Happening. And the book did not, in the contemporary manner, Happen. The book has just emerged in paperback, however, and deserves to be read in several ways at once—as a novelistic narrative, a revelation of continuing American wounds, and a formidable hypothesis about the nature of American reality.

It turns out that Rymer's Virgil, his guide to the saga of American Beach, MaVynee Betsch, "Beach Lady," as she is known, is the great-granddaughter of Abraham Lincoln Lewis, born in 1865, the patriarch and founder (in 1901) of Florida's first life insurance company, and the developer of American Beach as a resort for African Americans during the Jim Crow era. Christened "Marvyne" but having subtracted the "R" in her name when Ronald

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Reagan was elected president of the United States, "Beach Lady" turns out to have graduated from Oberlin College, then to have gone to Europe and become renowned for her soprano performances in Germany in the late 1950s and early 1960s, before she unaccountably quit singing, returned to Florida, and gave away all her money. She also turns out to be the older sister of one of the most accomplished women of her generation, Johnnetta Cole, the president of Atlanta's Spelman College. The mystery of the turn in her life haunts the book, as the demise of Jacksonville's once formidable black business community haunts the era of (partial) integration.

Rymer's method is as various as its subject—subjects, really—deserve. He is reporter, storyteller, investigator, and essayist as required, all with the purpose of demonstrating the many ways in which American Beach connects to the nation. An outline of the book's contents would no more convey its sinuousness than would an outline of one of Faulkner's novels. After a brief prologue introducing the reader to MaVynee Betsch and the book's themes, Rymer takes us into the town's recent atmosphere with sixty-five pages of a piercing story of a local police homicide, an all-too-familiar tragedy of racial oppression, but also showing its many-sidedness. He proceeds to reconstruct the history of the Afro-American Life Insurance Company, which thrived under segregated conditions, built American Beach as a resort refuge for blacks, and declined partly because the Lewis dynasty decomposed but partly because the end of segregation freed white-owned insurance companies to compete for black customers while the Afro-American was not able to reciprocate. Far from being marginal, "left behind," an exception to the rule, American Beach developed into an enclave within a relentless commercial culture. It turns out, in one of many turns of the screw, that "the modern lily-white 'plantations' [resorts] that MaVynee Betsch so detests have their historical provenance in her great-grandfather's invention of a corporate-sponsored vacation enclave shut off from a hostile exterior world."

RECENT AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS BY *DISSENT* EDITORS

Joanne Barkan, *The Riddle of Lost Lake*. Lyrick Publishing, 2000.

David Bensman, *Building Family School Partnerships in a South Bronx Classroom*, NCREST Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1999.

David Bensman, *Graduates of a Learning Community: Reflections on the Central Park East Elementary School*. Teachers College Press, 2000.

Marshall Berman, *Adventures in Marxism*. Verso, 1999.

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Caroll Seron, Bonnie Oglensky, and Robert Sauté, *The Part-Time Paradox: Time Norms, Professional Life, Family and Gender*. Routledge, 1999.

Todd Gitlin, *Sacrifice*. Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 1999.

Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*. University of California. Press, 2000. (A new edition, with a new introduction by the author.)

Robert Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers* (7th revised edition). Touchstone Press, 1999.

Agnès Heller, *A Theory of Modernity*. Blackwell, 1999.

Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo: A Bird's Eye View of Ecological Ethics*. Open Court Press,1999.

George Packer, *Blood of the Liberals*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2000.

Dennis Wrong, *The Oversocialized Conception of Man*. Columbia University Press, 2000. (Reissue of *Skeptical Sociology*, with a new introduction by the author.)

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In the course of relating a family saga with plot twists worthy of Raymond Chandler, Rymer also relates social history, drawing on E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie*, who would have recognized the story of descent from the grandeur of Lewis's bootstrap operation to the subsequent rise of tricksters "who saw the ideal of honorable enterprise as a public relations front for an American economic system that was in truth a game without rules, a scam that deserved to be scammed and taken for whatever it was worth, and not something to be trusted or patiently courted with integrity and thrift." Before he is done, Rymer has taken us to that utterly different but also deliberately founded Florida town, Disney's Celebration, and found the intersection of American Beach and Jacksonville's Zora Neale Hurston.

Above all, this is the story of free soul and activist MaVynee Betsch, a "wild-haired Cordelia loose on the heath of generational betrayal," standing forth not only as a distinct person but as a reproach to a contemporary black culture that mirrors the dominant obsessions of money-grubbing and acquisition. This memorable woman knows a lot of scores. But she is never reduced to a poster girl for a social analysis. There is no easy solution to the riddle of her transformation into Beach Lady. She is not a walking paragraph from anyone's grand theory. She reminds us of the strangeness of life, of the irreducible gap between personal life and social forces, even as social forces remain the crucible of personal life.

Neither despite MaVynee's gripping, singular story, nor because of it, this book is a memorable saga of the losses imposed by the relentless onslaught of progress American style, and of some fights against it. The story is deeply radical—it goes to the root. Early on in his book, Rymer states straight-out what is at stake here: "the old undiminished question, the line between money and what money cannot buy." The story of the twenty-first century will be the story of that line, the line between money and value. ●

TODD GITLIN 's most recent book is *Sacrifice*, a novel.

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Nothing Wrong with Reform

Editors:

In his interesting article ("Egalitarian Strategies," Summer 1999), John E. Roemer justifies equalizing profits in the following terms: "The fact is that, today, in advanced societies, most research and development is carried out by salaried workers in large firms, and so it is questionable how much individual entrepreneurial activity is needed for innovation. Of course there are individuals like Bill Gates, who invent software in their garage that eventually transforms an entire industry. But it is certainly not obvious that such entrepreneurs are necessary today." But the fact is that we do not know the future and that the ability for a firm or an industry or a society to adapt to unforeseen and unforeseeable circumstances depends upon inventive individuals who bypass habitual ways of doing things and create new products and procedures. Bill Gates, after all, is not ancient history, and any society that hopes to survive and progress needs to encourage the emergence of entrepreneurial types, even if that means a certain level of inequality in its reward structure. There is no ethical reason for opposing those inequalities from which everyone benefits, particularly the workers and the poor.

He also addresses the question of the welfare state with regard to the "undeserving" poor. Those who oppose the expansion of the welfare state, he says, distinguish between the deserving poor, who are poor "by virtue of bad luck," and the undeserving poor, who are just "lazy." But I think he misses the point. The critics of the welfare state have pointed out that the method of distributing benefits frequently created incentives to remain on welfare, and that the moral atmosphere encouraged some people to apply for welfare who otherwise could work. I remember attending a Socialist Scholars Conference in the late 1960s in which certain speakers advocated encouraging the poor to take advantage of the welfare system, that they had a moral right to the benefits. The poor are not lazy; they were victims of a system that discouraged some of them from finishing their education and becoming productive workers. There is nothing wrong with trying to reform such a system in order to motivate people to live in ways that they can respect and to contribute as much as they can to the general welfare. Egalitarianism does not justify expanding the welfare state in ways that harm the very people it is intended to help.

Charles Landesman
New York, N.Y.

Civil Society

Editors:

George Scialabba's review of Russell Jacoby's *The End of Utopia* (Dissent, Summer 1999) left me both disturbed and puzzled. Unlike Scialabba, I did not find any of Jacoby's "unfair digs" at other leftist intellectuals to be "amusing." Instead, I was left incredulous by Jacoby's consistently arrogant and condescending tone. On page after page, he mocks a wide range of intellectuals on the left, frequently distorting their views beyond recognition. In addition to savaging innumerable individuals, Jacoby continually overgeneralizes to the point of absurdity—railing against "the left" or "leftist intellectuals," and in doing so crudely sets up straw figures to demolish.

What so puzzled me about Scialabba's review was that, on the one hand, he wrote (quite eloquently), "Utopia is impossible unless, among an overwhelming majority, solidarity and trust are nearly instinctive. . . and democratic habits of self-confidence and tact are far better developed." Yet, on the other hand, he seemed to revel in Jacoby's mean-spirited "broadside against contemporary intellectuals, particularly those on the left."

There is no question that the left needs to carry on a lively internal dialogue to come up with solutions to the many ideological, strategic, and tactical issues with which we are faced. But, unless we can address each other with respect and civility, we will never succeed in building the kind of political movement that will be necessary to transform society.

Ken Brociner
Somerville, Mass.

George Scialabba Replies:

I'm sorry that Ken Brociner was annoyed by Jacoby's sar-

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casm and my enjoyment thereof. I'd only remind him that you can't have a "lively internal dialogue" without occasionally—pretty often, in fact—getting somebody or other's goat.

Abortion Decline

Editors:

It is strange that in Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's lament about the Clinton administration and abortion ("Democrats and Catholics," Fall 1999), and specifically the betrayal she felt about Clinton's alleged failure to follow through with his commitment to making abortions "safe, legal, and rare," she neglects to mention that abortions *have* become rarer! After an extended period in which the number of abortions in the United States stood at about 1.5 million per year, recently the number of abortions has noticeably declined to somewhere between 1.2 and 1.3 million per year. Some reasons for the decline—increased condom use in response to the AIDS crisis, use of new long-acting hormonal methods for birth control, a reduction in teenage sexual activity—are consistent with policies that have been supported by the Clinton administration (and opposed by many who also oppose abortion). Other reasons—especially the difficulty some women face in rural areas and small cities in finding abortion services—are not.

CAROLE JOFFE
Berkeley, Calif.

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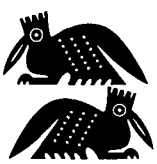

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AN AMERICAN LOVE STORY, a *cinema verité* treatment of an interracial family in Queens, aired for five nights on the Public Broadcasting System in mid-September. Compared to the documentary about the Loud family shown twenty-five years ago, this exercise in socially conscious voyeurism scarcely created a ripple. It's too bad, because the series turned out to be neither soap opera nor sermon but an entrancing view of a situational ethics of decency, as practiced on America's color line.

It's not the protagonists' human appeal that brought out this side of them. They were, in fact, an oddly untelegenic family despite their months of exposure to the camera. Bill Sims is a black blues musician, moderately successful; he is a devoted father and husband—at least he's always around—but you can't help noticing after a while that despite his warm chuckles and continual presence he rarely enters into anyone's talk or problems. One daughter, Cicily, is at Colgate, the other, Chaney, is twelve: they must have been giggly and self-conscious to begin with, and facing the camera, they often turn into goofy sitcom characters. Karen Sims, the white mother, comes across as cold and controlling, despite her lavish professions of feeling. There is a weird out-of-time, claustrophobic feeling to much of the film: no one ever seems to leave the house for long: everyone except the youngest daughter smokes madly; and the small apartment in Flushing, where most of the film takes place, looks like a refurbished set of the *Honeymooners*.

What fascinates is the efficacy of the Sims's knowing yet modest approach to racism. No one clambers onto a soapbox to orate on the race problem; nor does anyone try to minimize it. The rhetoric of race is rarely even used; the Race Question becomes a matter of getting through the day, a journey, a difficult encounter. The parents are no strangers to the nastier strains of postwar racism; in 1960s Marion, Ohio, where they both grew up, Bill was routinely jailed once he began dating Karen; Karen, an unwed mother of an interracial baby, was threatened with having Cicily removed by welfare authorities. Today, the strains are more mundane, at least in New York. Yet in Florida, where Karen's mother now lives, the Klan is enough of a presence to make it impossible for Bill and the girls to visit; and even when they drive upstate to pick up Cicily at Colgate, Bill brings along his passport to fend off any trouble with the police.

Political and scholarly pundits, white and black, treat such problems as occasions for generalization and allegory. But with the Simses, racial set pieces are drummed up only to be discarded as too cumbersome for the keener demands of making a life. Cicily, looped from a night out with her college friends, gives a tipsy paean to her parents on the lessons they've taught her about defying prejudice; but it comes off as a teenager's clumsy attempt at grandiloquence. Bill Sims returns to Marion to help his son from his troubled first marriage cope with a drug charge. In Marion, a shell of the old steel town, the black world Bill remembers from his childhood—the thriving church, the barbershop—is gone. As the dolor of provincial inertia seeps into him, he launches into a damning critique of the civil rights movement—"integration destroyed us as a people"—and you're mystified at what in the world the man could be thinking—a father of biracial children, a cosmopolitan New York musician. But the *bravura pronunciamento* fizzles: "Marion makes me crazy," he concludes, and laughs at himself.

The Simses laugh a lot in the film, and at first it gets on your nerves. But then you begin to sense laughter's charms, its antidotal properties to the slights, threats, humiliations, and sheer nuttiness that are racism's stock in trade. Ironic humor has a long, venerable history among black people. It's striking to see how much better than either liberal or nationalist platitudes it serves as a basis of daily practice for people of both races who are living right on top of the color line.

CHRISTINE STANSELL

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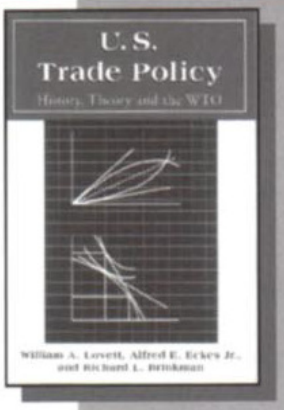

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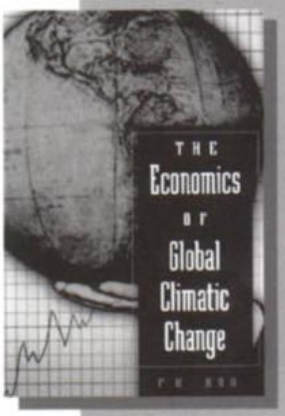

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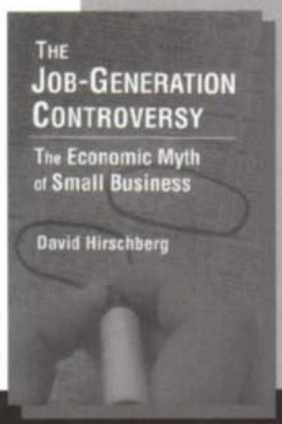

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